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JOSEPH C. BUSH



# A LOST CAUSE

*A STORY OF THE LAST REBELLION IN  
POLAND*

BY

W. W. ALDRED

IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

LONDON

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# A LOST CAUSE:

A Story of the Last Rebellion in Poland.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE, ETC.

MISS LUCY GOLING sat in the Countess's boudoir. Barbara had gone one way, namely, to Mr. Fipps's rooms, Lucy had gone the other, namely, to Rose Lodge, Yorkshire Terrace, both however bent on discussing the same subject, that is to say, the marriage of Augustus Fipps, third son of the Right Honourable Viscount Fipps with Lucy, daughter of Saul Golding, Esq., of Park House, etc.

“They want me to be married,” was Lucy’s complaint. “What was she to do?”

“Do nothing,” was Theodora’s oracular response. “You refer them to Gus, Gus will refer them to you. In that way things will go dallying on as long as you like.”

“But suppose Gus should wish the marriage to take place,” suggested Lucy.

“Gus will do nothing of the sort without your consent. If he should do such a thing you can break the engagement.”

“Theodora, do you think he *does* wish to break it off. Barbara seemed to suspect that—that—well that he had changed his mind. Do you think he cares for any one else?”

“My dear Lucy, I am afraid not. I am afraid that as long as he has a chance, he will be your lover, and disregard all the other beautiful girls in the world. That comes of being so pretty you see.”

Lucy blushed and laughed.

“Now, Theodora,” she said, “you are talking nonsense. There are lots of girls much better-looking than I, why should he not fall in love with them, and why does he not fall in love with you, dearest, for you know you are ever so much more beautiful than I, or any one else.”

“For a good reason, my dear. Granting that I am prettier, which I merely admit for the sake of argument, I am growing into an old woman, I shall soon be *passée*, while you are a young beauty, fresh risen upon the earth, for all the world like an Aphrodite. A man would be an irredeemable fool if he were to choose me,

or, as you said, anybody else in preference to you."

"Dora, you know it is quite wrong to flatter like that. If I were a man the first thing I should do would be to fall over head and ears and all in love with you."

"If I were a man, I should be dying of love for you, so we are quits. Being—thank Heaven—a woman, I simply spoil you."

"So you do; I declare I am getting more and more vain every day."

"You are. You fancy everybody is in love with you, now don't you?"

"No, but I wish somebody was."

"Oh hon, for somebody!  
Oh hey, for somebody!  
I would do—what would I not?  
For the sake of somebody,"

quoted Theodora.

"So I would," replied Lucy, drawing up her little figure, her eyes sparkling with enthusiasm the while.

A knock at the door. "Come in."

"The Honourable Mr. Fipps, Madame," says Peter at the door.

"Oh, what shall I do," exclaims Lucy, aghast; "I don't want to see him here."

“ Stay where you are. I will go down to him, I shall not be long.”

And Madame left the room.

In the drawing-room was Gus, with an anxious and irritable-looking forehead.

“ I wanted to see you, just for a minute,” he said. “ That woman, Mrs. Hatton, has been to see me this morning about settling my marriage.”

“ Well, and what did you say ? ”

“ I told her I left it to Lucy to decide. I thought that was best. What right has she to be meddling with us ? Surely we are old enough, to judge for ourselves ! ”

“ I don’t know that,” remarked Madame, quietly.

“ I have a good mind to break it off at once,” said Gus, without heeding her remark. “ Nothing but worry and confusion about it. They have been worrying Lucy about it, and between them I expect they will worry her into doing what she doesn’t wish.”

“ Yes, they have said something to her,” said Madame.

“ Has she told you ? ”

“ She has just told me about it. She is here now.”

“ Good heavens ! is she ? Don’t let her know I am here.”

“She knows it already. Peter announced you to us.”

“I had better not see her; she won’t care to meet me,” said Gus, rising.

“Stop a bit,” replied Madame, “I think you must see her, because it will not do for both of you to visit at my house without seeing each other. On the whole, I think it will be best for you to see her at once.”

“Well, I will if you wish it.”

“I should like to know first of all what your intentions are. Are you of the same mind now?”

“Of course,” he said.

“And you still keep to our agreement, that the engagement should be prolonged indefinitely?” asked the Countess.

“If she wishes it.”

“I believe she does, but you shall ask her, yourself, and I will be witness to your mutual arrangement.”

So saying, the Countess led the way upstairs to her boudoir.

“I have brought Gus upstairs,” she said to Lucy, on entering the room.

Gus came forward shyly and said, “How do you do——” and stopped short, without giving Lucy her name.

Lucy rose from the sofa on which she had been sitting, blushing with equal shyness, and held out her hand which Gus just touched with his own.

Certainly their position was an anomalous one. Here were two young people who had been engaged for two years, who were still engaged, yet wishing to avoid one another, and feeling very awkward at meeting. It was difficult to imagine two such almost strangers being married, at least for the present.

An awkward silence would have followed their greeting had not the Countess at once stated the case. "My dear Lucy," she began, "now Mr. Fipps is here we had better settle the business at once, and it will save us any future trouble and bother. I will just state the case so that you can each of you decide it. A short time ago you both agreed through me that the engagement should continue with the option of either of you breaking it, if either of you wished. Now Mr. and Mrs. Golding, as I understand, wish to have something settled about it. Mr. Fipps therefore wishes to know what is your decision; whether you wish the marriage to be definitely arranged; or whether the engagement is simply to continue as before; or whether you would prefer that it should be

broken off mutually. I think I have correctly stated your ideas," she added, turning to Gus.

"Yes," he said.

Then they both looked for a reply from Lucy. She hesitated a moment and then said, "I will do what you advise," to Theodora.

"No, my dear, I shall not advise you now; just do what you please."

Lucy sat on the sofa with her head bent down, fingering with her dress, a picture of irresolution, while Gus alternately looked at her and at a picture opposite him; waiting for the decision of his fate.

At length Lucy said in a low voice, slowly, "I think it had better go on."

"You mean that the engagement shall go on as before without any fixed term," said Madame.

"Yes," answered Lucy, looking at her, "isn't that best?"

"That is really your wish, Miss Golding," said Gus.

"Yes," she answered, glancing at him (how earnestly he was looking at her!) "I think so, if you wish it."

"I wish you to do exactly as you please," he said.

"Very well," said Lucy.

“Then the engagement is to continue as before, either of you being free to break it at any future time by mutual consent. Is that so?” asked the Countess.

“Yes,” said Gus.

“Yes,” said Lucy.

“Then,” said the Countess rising and going to the window, “you had better inform Mr. Golding, Gus, that you and Lucy have decided that the engagement shall be indefinitely prolonged, and if he asks your reason,” she added, looking round from the window, “you can say that you wish to wait until your prospects are more settled.”

“Very good,” said Gus.

Now the window of Countess Woronzow’s boudoir was in the French style, and opened on to a balcony filled with flowers. Madame stepped out on to the balcony, and began arranging and examining the plants, whereby she practically left the young couple to themselves.

Lucy looked reproachfully at the window, and Gus looked at his boots. Both were silent for a minute or so. At length Gus, after giving his right boot one or two taps with his stick, looked up and began—

“Miss——” “Golding” he was going to say,

but thought better of it and said "Lucy"—so he said "Miss, Lucy, I heard—that is, Mrs. Hatton told me—that you thought—that is, she thought—that you considered I had not been so a—frequent in my attentions lately to you. I assure you it is quite unintentional on my part."

"Oh, yes," interrupted Lucy, hurriedly. "I never said anything of the sort; it is a mistake, really."

"Of course I don't want to bore you," proceeded Gus, "and if I have in any way offended you by—"

"Oh, no," said Lucy, again looking frankly up at him, but immediately looking down again on meeting his eyes. "Please don't say anything more about it."

"I hope," Gus added, "you will let me do anything I can for you at any time."

"Yes, I will," she answered, "and you will come and see us, see me, as often as you like."

"Thanks, if you don't mind."

Here the *tête-à-tête* was interrupted by the Countess stepping into the room, with a fine cream-white rosebud in her hand.

"There, Gus, put that in your button-hole. Don't go and boast to everyone that I gave it to you, now."

“ All right,” said Gus, rising to take the rose, “ thanks,” and he was going to put it in his coat, when—

“ Now, then,” said the Countess, “ why don’t yon ask your fair lady to bless it for you. A nice gallant you are ! ”

There was nothing for it but to hand the little flower to Lucy, which Gus did with manifest embarrassment, saying, “ Will you do me the favour, Lucy.”

She blushed and took the rose, while Gus stood watching the result. Lucy put the flower to her delicate little nose.

“ It does smell sweet,” she said.

“ You may keep it if you like,” said Gus.

“ No, no,” from Madame ; “ I gave it to you, and you must keep it.”

Then she and Lucy looked at each other and Lucy laughed and just touched the petals of the rose with her fresh lips, and handed it back to Gus, who had sufficient wit to raise it to his lips before putting it carefully in his coat.

“ Not bad for a beginner,” said the Countess. “ I shall make something of you yet.”

“ A man would be an awful fool not to learn from you,” said Gus, squeezing the hand she gave him.

Then he took Lucy's hand. "Good-bye, Lucy, for the present; I shall see you again soon."

"Yes," she said, "good-bye."

He held her hand for an instant. He was sorely tempted to raise it, ungloved as it was, to his lips, but he thought it was perhaps presuming too much on the favour she had already shown him, and she began to gently pull it away, so he let it go; and with a "Good-day" to the Countess left the room.

"Poor old Gus!" said Theodora, when he had gone. "I never knew him to be in love before, but he has got the disease badly this time. Well, he will be perfectly contented with his blessed rose. I would not mind laying a wager that he kissed it again the moment he was outside the door."

"I declare you are quite on his side, Dora, I am sure he would not do half as well without your prompting."

"I know. Really, he is a nice man, and for my part I am always on the side of the one who loves."

"Then why are you not on my side?"

"So I am, darling."

Meanwhile Gus went downstairs, having caused Madame to win her proposed bet, and at the

house door found Peter talking casually to Watkins outside.

“ Hullo, Watkins,” says Gus, “ quite well ? ”

“ Yes, thank ye, sir,” says Watkins, touching his hat.

“ Is Jagellon going to Goodwood ? ”

“ Yes, sir, I believe so.”

“ Any attraction—eh, Watkins ? ”

“ Beg pardon, sir ? ”

“ Oh, you need’nt be afraid to tell me. Who’s the new favourite ? ”

“ There ain’t no woman, sir ; it is nought but a betting, and a playing cards, all t’ day long.”

“ What a fellow he is. What’s the tip for Goodwood ? ”

“ Well, sir, I have heard tell as ‘ Birklands ’ is good for t’ handicap.”

“ All right, I’ll see about getting a sovereign or two on him. Good-day.”

“ Good day to you, sir,” from the two servants.

“ He’s a good sort,” said Watkins, when the honourable gentleman was out of hearing.

“ Yes,” said Peter.

“ After the little ‘un—eh ? ”

“ Yes, I think so.”

After a pause, Watkins said, “ Well, Peter, I’ll see yer after I comes from races. May be I

shan't see much more of yer. I don't know where I may have to go when he's gone."

"Where is he going?" asked Peter.

"To the devil!" answered the other, jerking his left thumb over his shoulder. Then he nodded to Peter, and walked gloomily away.

And his interview with Peter was duly reported, as every interview was, and as, perhaps, Watkins knew it would be reported, to Countess Woronzow, casually, during the day.

For Peter told the Countess's maid, and of course the maid had plenty of occasions, which she duly improved, for relating all the little gossip she knew to her mistress.

## CHAPTER II.

## OVER DINNER.

THE dining-room of the Cocoa Club was very full on the Saturday before the Goodwood week. Country members passing through London principally helped to swell the muster at the festive board, and these were met by a large contingent of men who had not yet left for Brighton or Chichester, so that the Club wore a very animated appearance at the dinner hour, that is to say about half past seven o'clock in the evening.

The dining-room of the Cocoa Club—by the bye, why it is called after that estimable tree I do not know. Why Athenæum? Who knows? At some almost antediluvian date the latter club may have been a temple of Athene, and similarly when the Indies were first discovered and cocoa was invented, the beverage may have enjoyed a temporary taste of fashion, and the club may have been notorious for the quantity of cocoa drunk there. But now there is proba-

bly not one cup of cocoa drunk in the club in one year, and the name has become, except to a few antiquarians, a mystery.

The dining-room of the Cocoa Club, I repeat for the third time, was comfortably filled with diners and their servants. There was a pleasant murmur of voices in the room, so even and monotonous that it had the soothing effect of a complete silence ; the room was warm with the scent of wines and dainty dishes ; it was a warmth that was in itself voluptuous and intoxicating. There was an air of sensual luxury in the place ; men's faces were flushed with the pleasures of the table ; healthily ruddy faces, with flowing beards, looked over the glasses of champagne and the decanters of liqueurs.

Yet was there no boisterous laughter, no loud voices amongst the throng. The diners spoke in measured tones ; servants glided hither and thither almost noiselessly on the soft carpet, and if they spoke, they spoke in a half whisper, bending down to receive their masters' orders. And amidst the general murmur one hardly perceived the monotonous tinkling of glasses or the clatter of knives and forks and dishes—there was no hurry or confusion, all was done quietly and luxuriously in the warm room, and the sunlight over head (not too glaring) and the wax

candles on some of the tables shed a warm light on the grey, or flaxen, or black heads, and the ruddy faces and the neat black coats of the occupants of the various tables.

At one of the small square tables ranged round the room sat General Bagrathion and Lord Uttoxeter close to the bay window with blinds carefully drawn down and heavy damask curtains.

At the opposite corner of the room sat Count Jagellon and a well-known member of the Club —Mr. Hudson, whom we have heard of before. Mr. Hudson was one of those men who at an early age have had the misfortune to lose their fathers and come into a considerable fortune.

Mr. Hudson having experienced that melancholy event while a youthful member of the University of Oxford, had rapidly partaken of the lighter vices which that venerable institution affords for the education of the young and had since risen to the more piquant vice of gambling, at which, combined with drinking, he was considered by all impartial persons a perfect adept.

Jagellon had made this gentleman's acquaintance at the University, and had kept it up ever since under more or less favourable auspices to each of them.

These two worthies, now ensconced in a snug corner of the room over a piquant menu concocted by Mr. Hudson, and containing some dishes of considerable warmth to the palate, were discussing their final arrangements for a flight towards Goodwood, and talking over men and things in general.

“ Is that that revolutionary man—what’s his name?—over there with Uttoxeter? What the deuce can those two have to do with one another? ” inquired Hudson.

“ My dear fellow, *la femme est partout*. The kernel of politics is, after all, woman; and where woman is there is also Uttoxeter: ergo, behold the combination.”

“ I wonder which knows the most—Uttoxeter, or what’s his name? ”

“ Bagrathion.”

“ Bagrathion! sounds queer, does it not? ”

“ Ha! ha! ” laughed Jagellon.

“ Those Oriental fellows always have queer names; it’s in the breed. Seriously, I have a great theory on the question of names. You never met with a properly vicious man called Smith simply, and my belief is that if you could christen these Jews, Turks, and Orientals with fresh names they would forswear polygamy and all that sort of thing.”

“ Well, I wouldn’t mind backing Bagrathion against Uttoxeter any day for knowledge and experience of things.”

“ Done with you, for a fiver. I’ll bet you Uttoxeter can give the Oriental a vice or two and beat him by lengths. Look here, I must have a bottle of hock with this salmi. Here, Robins, a bottle of Rudesheimer,” and Mr. Hudson assaulted the salmi and hock with equal success.

Meanwhile, at the opposite side of the room, Lord Uttoxeter and General Bagrathion ate and were well filled. I believe I have omitted to mention that at Countess Woronzow’s party my Lord had been very much taken with the General; as a man of taste he had been very much pleased with the General’s anecdotes, and he had been impressed with the depth and breadth of his knowledge. An acquaintance sprang up between them. Lord Uttoxeter had already dined with the Russian at his hotel, and had learnt much about the habits and customs of the East, and now he was entertaining the General at his own Club.

It is, perhaps, necessary to describe the Earl of Uttoxeter, because there are many people who have no idea of the existence of such a man in civilized England in this century, and

they might otherwise believe that this personage was a myth—a mere creation of a morbid imagination. Lord Uttoxeter, then (the name is pronounced in full), is a man with greyish-brown hair, rather thin, parted in the middle, and lying very smooth over his head, forming a sort of arch over his forehead. His face, which is rather fat and smooth, is clean-shaved, except, if I remember right, for a pair of small whiskers by his ears, which are large. He is altogether rather fat and smooth, with his rounded shoulders and long body. You would have said that he was intended by Nature for a Methodist minister, only your Methodist minister has generally grey eyes or small black ones, and thin lips, whereas Lord Uttoxeter has small brown eyes, with a sort of bashfulness in them that is deceptive, and he has full lips, his mouth being never quite closed. No doubt, originally, Lord Uttoxeter had a shy, reserved disposition, secretly yearning after hidden truths, but being born to a title and an immense estate, he was enabled to obtain so much experience and such accurate knowledge, that he lost his natural shyness and timidity, and blossomed into a full-grown man of the world. Yet he still retained the outward semblance of a pious minister of the Word, even in the unctuous smoothness of

his voice, which was always like that of a wearied preacher, half in earnest and half in despair of borrowing the ears of his audience. Possibly there was some secret affinity between the peer and the preacher.

Well, Lord Uttoxeter and Bagrathion had already got through half their repast, with its ortolans, its *côtelettes de saumon à l'Italienne*, its *filet de bœuf à la Maréchal*, I think it is called, and other curiosities. They had run through the various topics of cookery, society, and politics, and General Bagrathion had already finished off a whole bottle of sherry, to the admiration of his host, when my Lord gave air to the following remark,—

“What interests me about your battles and adventures, Bagrathion, is your own personal share in them. You know I never met with a really good General before. Of course, I know many of our men, but then—well, you know, I dare say, what they are as a rule.”

“I assure you,” replied the General, after swallowing some claret, “that I am no real General. I have no principles of action; I have had to do just what I could on the spur of the moment.”

“That may be,” proceeded Lord Uttoxeter, nibbling at some ice-pudding (I cannot remember the name of it), “but you are a man who

has had to fight his way through it, you know. Now, for my part, I always feel peculiarly little interest in the official and historical accounts of engagements. ‘*Nos troupes s’élancèrent sur l’ennemie*,’ or, ‘the first, fifth, tenth, and twentieth regiments, forming the left wing of the second corps, then debouched on the right’—and all that sort of thing, you know what I mean.”

Lord Uttoxeter spoke in a plaintive voice.

“ My dear sir, we are obliged to use that form in our despatches. There is a form for diplomatic despatches, a form for business letters, a form for generals ; it’s the same thing.”

“ Of course, of course. Whether one’s monarchs and ministers understand the language I don’t know, but I confess that I feel as much interest in the large printed accounts of battles in newspapers, as in a paper read at a geographical or botanical, or statistical society. Such things convey no ideas to my mind. When you tell me all about the affair it is so different. When you were telling me the other night about the ground being so slushy that your horse could hardly get along, I seemed to feel the difficulties of the situation at once—you know what I mean.”

“ Ah ! you would understand it still better if you had once fought. I suppose you never

were present at an engagement?" asked the General.

"No-o. I once thought of seeing some fighting, but, after some consideration, I thought it would be rather going out of my way to seek what, after all, might not be any pleasure, and other engagements seemed to interfere with the attempt at the time, so I gave it up. Were there to be any prospect of a battle, at Portsmouth, say, I should at once take the express train and go to see it; but on the Continent it is so different, you know. I don't think," he added, meditatively sipping his claret, "I should feel any great fear on such an occasion. I suppose you don't mind me alluding to such a thing—you never feel any timidity in the heat of an engagement, do you?"

"No, I cannot remember ever having felt any fear of the danger. No doubt I did at first—every one does, or ought to do—it's practice; you get used to hearing the bullets whistling past. The only thing I do dread," proceeded the General, confidentially, "is falling alive into the enemy's hands." The General's face was flushed, as well it might be, after drinking a bottle of the Club's fine sherry, and two bottles of claret to boot, and a bottle of real port which he was now imbibing. The Earl looked

interested. “ You civilized people don’t understand it. If you are taken prisoner, you are safe ; but with savage nations, why, death is the least thing ; you may be maimed for life, slowly burnt to death—anything.”

“ Ah ! ” said my Lord.

“ I will tell you what my plan is—between ourselves.”

“ Of course, of course.”

“ I was once reading Plutarch’s Lives, and was struck with Hannibal’s idea of carrying poison with him in a ring. You know the story ? ”

“ Yes ; I believe I once did read Plutarch.”

“ Well, I adopted the plan, *voilà !* ” and the General held out his left hand, on the middle finger of which glistened a large gold ring, with a blood-stone set in it.

“ In—deed ! ” drawled the Earl, examining the ring. “ And where, may I ask, do you carry the poison ? ”

“ Inside—see ! ” The General gently pressed one side of the ring, and the stone instantly moved. He put a finger of his right hand to it, and raised the stone, disclosing a cavity in the gold filled with a clear liquid of about two grains weight.

“ Very interesting, indeed,” remarked Lord Uttoxeter. “ Can you tell me how it is done ? ”

“ You observe,” replied the General, “ there is a small catch of platinum ; that is part of a spring of the same metal, which is moved by pressing the little filagree work here. The thin gold rim round the stone is attached to a delicate hinge, which runs so easily that the stone falls of its own weight, you see.” He let go the stone, and it dropped down at once. “ Now I can press it with my thumb, and it shuts again.”

“ Dear me ! ” said the Earl, “ very ingenious, indeed. What does it at present contain ? ”

“ The purest aconite ; drink the contents of this, and you will be dead in about half an hour.”

“ Dear me ! General, would you object to lending me the ring for a short time ? I should like to procure a similar one on the same pattern.”

“ Take it,” said the General. “ Please accept it as a keepsake.” He took it off his finger and handed it to Uttoxeter.

“ No, no, I couldn’t think of such a thing,” protested the other ; “ I only wished to get one like it.”

“ I hope you will not refuse it,” said Bagration. “ You don’t want the poison, eh ? ” And he opened the ring and shook out a couple

of liquid drops on to the carpet, then wiped the ring with his napkin. "There," said he, "it is quite harmless now."

"If I accept it I must replace it with my own," said his lordship, taking off a diamond ring he wore on his finger.

"Your humble servant, my lord," and then they proceeded to exchange rings.

"But how shall you do without it?" asked my lord.

"Oh, I have another, a ruby, in my portmanteau."

"Well, it fits me very well," remarked Lord Uttoxeter; "and now let me give you my idea. *Your* design in procuring this dangerous little trifle is to guard against the accidents of war. *Mine*, on the contrary, is to promote the affairs of love."

"Of what?" inquired the General.

"Of love!" repeated Uttoxeter. "My view is this. There are two sorts of tactics employed in the siege of the fair sex, both of which perhaps procure one equal pleasure when they take one's fancy—the slow siege and the *oup de main*."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the General, "I see your plan; *c'est très fort*."

"You do? Allow me, however, to explain

it further," said my lord, leaning back in his chair, with one hand on the table holding his glass. "Women as a rule, and especially English women, I think, have a strange obstinacy in their dispositions—a peculiar timidity. It is for this reason, in my opinion, that the tactics of slow and regular sieges are almost universally resorted to, at least in this country. For my part, I must confess that I have never taken a city of any importance by any other method. But with this engine of war, is not the *coup de main* feasible, nay certain?"

"It is quite easy," answered the General, "for I have done it myself."

"In—deed! Under what circumstances?"

"Oh, no love affair," said the General, laughing. "I had a spy with me that I wanted to get rid of. I dared not kill him, for he was a person of high rank, and a countryman of most of my soldiers. I asked him to dinner, poured him out a glass of wine, and contrived to drop some laudanum into the glass out of that ring. I left him asleep in a barn, and marched away with my army."

"Precisely, what could be simpler, what more certain of success?" said Lord Uttoxeter, a faint spark of enthusiasm lighting up his visage. "You mark down your prey; it is at one of

those dubious balls, say ; you adjourn to the apartment devoted to light refreshments ; you pour out a glass of foaming champagne ; you turn your hand over and a drop falls into the wine. The rest is very simple."

The General answered nothing to this speech ; he was gazing, lost in thought, at the glass filled with red wine.

"Or," continued Uttoxeter in the tone of a Chadbond, "you have one of those sudden rencontres ; you descry, it may be in the public thoroughfare, a charming stranger, not quite a lady—you know what I mean. The beauty in question may be easily allured into conversation ; you parade before her the elegancies of this or that dining place, the diversions of this or that theatre. It is only for fun, you say ; you are lonely, you have nothing to do. Naturally you dine together. You employ the same tactics, and with the same success."

"*Et après ?*" said the General, half to himself.

"*Après*," repeated Lord Uttoxeter, "proceed according to rule." The General smiled.

"No, no, my dear Bagrathion," continued my lord, noticing the expression on the other's face, and laying his hand on his arm, "show yourself worthy of your conquest. Would you conquer

only to desert? No. Let us be just and generous. Justice and courage is my motto; believe me, it is cheaper in the end."

"Ha! ha!" laughed General Bagrathion, "I will be guided by your experience."

"Do so, my dear General. Let us both inaugurate the new tactics which are to change the whole art of love."

"Well, I will, if I have an opportunity," said General Bagrathion.

"I shall begin the campaign at once," said Lord Uttoxeter, rising from his chair, "and you shall soon hear of my success."

Then they both proceeded to the smoking-room.

"I am d—d if Uttoxeter isn't *tight*," remarked Jagellon to his companion, on seeing the two passing out of the room.

"You can always tell it by the affectionate way in which he takes another man by the arm."

"I know. A man who becomes simply affectionate when he's drunk is a great bore," replied Hudson.

"I say, Hudson, how about your bet? Bagrathion's as fit as possible."

"Oh, I bar the vice of drinking; besides, after all, drinking is not a vice, my dear fellow,

except among the lower classes ; it's a necessity to most men."

"Ah, ha ! you'll lose your bet, my boy."

"I swear," returned Mr. Hudson, "I shall be drunk myself if I drink any more of this Tokay."

"All right, let's have some liqueur," said Jagellon, finishing his glass and pouring out a fresh one.

"No, no, I shall have coffee *avec*. I say, let's 'rook' old Uttoxeter. He is just in condition for a game," suggested Hudson.

"I don't mind, Uttoxeter is fair game. That fellow doesn't miss a hundred or so ; it is only we poor duffers who have to play cautiously."

"Yes, but those rich fellows always take precious good care how they spend their money. He don't lend or give Mrs. P. more than he can help, you may be sure."

"Well," said Jagellon, "I cannot understand a man dangling after a woman as he does——"

"Oh, oh ! Jagellon ; how about that little opera girl then ? You needn't talk."

Mr. Hudson was referring to a certain Mademoiselle Dash whose name had been erroneously connected with Jagellon's in the Club.

"It is off," replied Jagellon. "She's got an engagement at the opera. Between ourselves,

it never was a serious affair. I was pleased with her voice, she with my attentions, that was all. We parted excellent friends."

"Any successor?"

"No. I await the decrees of fate."

So saying Jagellon rose from the table, threw his napkin thereon and strolled to the door, followed by his comrade.

In the smoking-room of the club they found Bagrathion engaged in conversation with a number of men there.

Mr. Hudson went and sat down near Lord Uttoxeter, who at once entered into conversation with him about Goodwood.

Jagellon lounged against one of the tables smoking a great cigar and listening languidly to the talking around him.

"Yes, I have enjoyed a very pleasant summer here," General Bagrathion was saying. "Every one has been hospitable to me, and the worst of it is I don't know how to return it."

"Give a dinner or something," suggested one man.

"Yes, I would, only I am afraid ladies would not like to dine at my hotel. There are several ladies I ought to entertain."

"Give a feed at the Equality," suggested Jagellon.

“But I am not a member,” said the General, turning to him.

“Oh, that doesn’t matter,” said another man. “We can easily arrange it for you.”

“We can elect you an honorary member for the occasion,” said Jagellon.

“You can always get ladies there,” remarked a third man.

“It is a good idea if it could be done,” said Bagrathion.

“Nothing easier,” said Jagellon. “Hudson there will do everything for you; he is a treasurer.”

“What’s that?” asked Hudson, looking up.

“General Bagrathion wants to give a fête at the Equality; you can do it, can’t you? Get him elected as an honorary member, or something.”

“Most happy,” returned Hudson. “When is it to be?”

“Well, I think after Goodwood.”

“Let’s say the Saturday after Brighton,” suggested Hudson; “there will be a lot of people in town then.”

“Very good,” said Bagrathion.

Then they all fell to discussing the arrangements and the cost, about which the General said he did not care. Mr. Hudson could give

him a round estimate of the amount, and he would hand him a cheque.

It was agreed also to limit the number of guests to eighty or ninety, and that the General should name the ladies and strangers whom he wished to be invited, and send them tickets of admission.

Having arranged this little matter, General Bagrathion rose to go, declining Lord Uttoxeter's invitation to join in a game at cards with Jagellon and Hudson, on the plea that he had some business to transact before going to bed. So the General went home in a cab, leaving Uttoxeter, Jagellon and Mr. Hudson to their Napoleon.

And when he arrived at his hotel he sent his secretary to bed and remained alone in his private room pacing to and fro and meditating, it may be, on some tactics in war, or some new plot to be concocted.

So he was occupied, as Willaume heard him when he went to bed. He was still walking about his room, and sitting down and getting up again to rummage in his portmanteau and travelling-cases, when the people of the hotel closed the doors and went to bed, rejoicing in the rest of the night.

And the policeman of the early morning

looked up at the light in the window and tried to guess, having nothing else to think about, what was the meaning of a light in the hotel at that hour of the morning. But the General had gone to bed when Jagellon left the Club, and walked home by the uncertain light of the moon and the approaching sun.

Poor Jagellon ! As fate and the gods would have it, instead of “rooking” Lord Uttoxeter, as Mr. Hudson had expressed it, Jagellon and Mr. Hudson had been “rooked” by the Earl’s superior fortune to the tune of a few hundreds between them. Mr. Hudson had consoled himself for his losses by becoming half inebriated, in which condition Jagellon conducted him to the Albany, in which locality, street, place, terrace, or whatever it may be called, Jagellon left him solemnly declaring that he felt peculiarly well in body and mind.

Then Jagellon was left to the companionship of the morning star and the waning moon, and of one or two waggons laden with fruit on their way to Covent Garden, and of a stray policeman, and of one or two hideous women who dared to address him at that hour of the night. Jagellon heeded them not, but turned out of Bond Street, and made his way through the squares of Mayfair, watching the delicate lights

and shadows of the moon on the trees of the squares and the pillars and balconies of the houses.

Before the porch of one of these splendid mansions he stopped a moment to observe a bundle that lay against one of the pillars on the steps. Merely an Arab boy that was sleeping the sleep of youth on the doorstep, his head supported against the pillar and his legs bent up. A quiet, cool, and dark corner, for only his legs were lit by the feeble rays of the moon, revealing a small white knee which had worked its way through the tattered breeches.

“The little beggar!” said Jagellon to himself, watching the sleeper. He noticed that the boy had reddish hair and not a particularly pretty face, but his eyelids were so long and tender, his mouth had such pretty curves, he was almost smiling in his sleep.

So the two wanderers of the night were together, the one asleep, the other watching him. After all, what was the difference between them?—both leading aimless, reckless, ne’er-do-well lives; the one growing penniless, the other having already attained to that bliss? The only difference was that a tailor would have preferred the dress of the one, and an artist that of the other.

“By Jove! he sleeps soundly,” muttered Jagellon. The sleeping Arab, whether roused by the sound of his voice, or by that indefinable feeling of another’s presence, suddenly opened his eyes and stared fixedly and fearfully at Jagellon, meditating a flight. A feeling of compunction came over Jagellon at having awakened the boy. He felt in his pocket. Unfortunately he had little silver—only half-a-crown; his gold had, of course, all gone.

“Go to sleep again,” he said. “Good-night,” and he chucked the solitary half-crown into the boy’s lap. The boy only stared at his retreating figure, then grasped the coin, and fell asleep again.

Their positions were now reversed; the tailor’s man was penniless, the artist’s choice was rich. So Jagellon, the Arab of Society, pursued his solitary way penniless, fortuneless, unbeloved by that octopus of a society which only waited till it had sucked him dry to leave him to his ruin. He only turned to look once more at Artemis, the huntress of the skies, and to think, perchance, of a woman as beautiful and chaste as the goddess herself.

## CHAPTER III.

## AFTER DINNER.

MRS. HATTON during this time was steadily acquiring knowledge—unconsciously. No doubt she believed herself to be a person of considerable mental endowments and experience in the ways of the world. That was her view of the matter. In Mrs. Hatton's opinion she had simply outwitted Mr. Fipps, the diplomatist, and the proof of this to her mind lay in the fact that Gus called, a day or two after his interview with her. Gus called and was adroitly invited to dinner at Park House, by Mrs. Barbara. "Now," she said to her father that evening, "we will just have this business settled. You shall have it out with him after dinner," and she proceeded to "coach" Mr. Golding as to the attitude he ought to take up on the occasion before his future son-in-law.

In her opinion, the exact day should be fixed at once. October the 25th, she thought, would be an excellent date, leaving plenty of time for

the preparations for the marriage. "Nail him down to a date," said Mrs. Hatton. "If he was sincere in what he said to me, he must agree to your proposition. If not, why," concluded Mrs. Hatton, "that settles it."

"But what does Lucy say about it?" inquired Mr. Golding. "I want her to have her way in the whole thing."

"Oh," replied Mrs. Hatton, indifferently, "she leaves it entirely in our hands; she will do what we think best."

So Mrs. Hatton, as general manager of the household, arranged this matter amongst her various duties, such as the settlement of questions about the wages of servants, the buying of new curtains for the drawing-rooms, the time for cleaning the house, etc.

Gus came punctually to the dinner, arriving, to say the truth, before the time, and he had to be entertained by Mrs. Golding and Lucy in the drawing-room; for Lucy had said, "Mamma, don't let me have a *tête-à-tête* with him before dinner, it is so stupid." Gus did not mind so long as he could have a little sight of his lady-love without too many people being present. Time was when Gus used to come in a little late on these occasions, and take his seat at table with a casual "How do, Lucy?" and lounge

after dinner in the drawing-room, listening indifferently to papa's talk and Lucy's singing. But the times had changed since then ; a quiet *quart d'heure* before dinner was now precious ; the way from the drawing-room to the dining-room was all too short with the little hand ever so gently pressing on his arm, and the eating and drinking, however good the viands, was a bore only tolerable on account of one or two words exchanged with his neighbour. Therefore the dining-room was decidedly dull after the ladies had risen and fled from the room, the door having been held open by Gus, who thereby obtained one glance at a bent head and downcast eyes as Lucy moved quietly past him.

Mr. Hatton only remained after the departure of the ladies long enough to drink a glass of sherry, having been ordered so to do by his lady and mistress, so that Mr. Golding and Gus might be left together.

Mr. Golding having watched the behaviour of Gus over dinner, and talked the matter over beforehand, *more conjugum*, with his wife, resolved to take matters quietly, to settle the day between them, and not " nail down " Gus, as Mrs. Hatton had suggested. For he was convinced from what he saw that the rumour of Gus wishing to break his engagement was one of

those “taradiddles,” as he called them, that are ever being conceived and brought into the world out of the fruitful brains of women.

Wherefore, having considered all these things, Mr. Golding filled his guest’s glass with his best Latour, set a bottle of Port before himself, and began as follows:—

“Now we are alone, Fipps, we might as well talk over family affairs. I should like to be able to come to some definite agreement about your marriage.”

“I think you should speak first, sir. Let me know what are your ideas, and I will do my best to agree to them,” replied Gus.

“Well, my opinion is that it is time you were married, both of you. You have been engaged more than two years, mind you, and for my part I don’t believe in long engagements. I remember I was engaged three years, and the consequence was that we both of us got thoroughly tired of waiting and ran helter-skelter into marriage,” said Mr. Golding with a grim smile. “It was all done in a hurry, and we had to go into lodgings for six months. It is an uncomfortable way of doing things, to my mind. Things are much better done smoothly and quietly. That was the only occasion,” he added, “when I ever did a thing in a hurry.

No harm was done, but then every one ain't like Lizzie" (Mrs. Golding), "and perhaps" (laughing) "every one ain't like me. Let weddings be like bills, I say—a month, or three months, or six months after date we will be married; that's my form."

"I quite agree with you," Gus replied to this speech of Mr. Golding's. "Sometimes I regret we were not married a year ago."

"Then the sooner you remedy that defect the better," put in Mr. Golding.

"But there were reasons against it then, and I think there are reasons against it now. You see," went on Gus, nursing one pretty patent-leather shoe, "at present the money is all on one side."

"Why, you don't want any alteration in the settlements we agreed on?" interrupted Mr. Golding.

"Not at all. That's all settled and done with. But I do not wish to be entirely dependent on my wife. I should wish to have a definite income of my own, were it only three hundred a year—sufficient, at least, to keep myself, and to pay my private and personal expenses. My position in the Service is not yet assured, and in these circumstances it seems to me only right to leave the decision in Lucy's hands."

"Have you talked the matter over?" asked Mr. Golding.

"Yes, and Lucy—a—agrees with me that the wedding should—a—be postponed for the present."

"Do you mean that she wishes the engagement to continue indefinitely?"

"Yes."

"But I understood that Lucy had no objection to the wedding taking place at once—that she wished us to settle the matter."

"That is not the case," said Gus.

"When did you hear this, then?" asked the other.

"Last Thursday. We met by accident at Countess Woronzow's, and in the Countess's presence we agreed between ourselves that it would be better for the engagement to continue as before—for the present."

"This is all news to me." Mr. Golding was leaning over the table looking keenly at his guest. "Do I understand you to say that it is Lucy's own wish that the wedding should be postponed?"

"Certainly."

"Did she give you any particular reason for this?"

Gus thought for a moment. "She gave no

reason precisely ; but I think," he said, " I may say that she appreciates my wish to have a settled income of my own, and—and I think we both feel that we have something to learn of each other."

" Hm !—I shall see her about it myself. I don't doubt your word, of course."

" I wish you would see her, so that there may be no mistake about her wishes."

" Then you will agree to what she says ? "

" Of course. I believe I have already done so."

" And if she wished the marriage to take place next week you would consent ? "

Gus turned round abruptly and reached over to some biscuits, his face being turned away from his host.

" I shall have no such luck," he muttered. Then he got up from the table and walked to the window, which was open, and looked out of it down the long road.

The old man watched his movements closely. Presently he rose and put his hand on Gus's shoulder.

" Look here, Gus, my boy, so long as you aim at my girl's happiness and act only for her good, you'll never find me disagree with you. So take your own course in the matter, and never mind

what anybody says. And if you are in any difficulty come to me ; that's all. You can both of you trust me."

"Thanks," said Gus, turning round and looking frankly in the other's face.

"Now let's join the ladies," said the old gentleman, briskly. And so their conference ended.

In the meantime Lucy had passed a very uncomfortable half-hour in the drawing-room. Mr. Hatton came in soon after the ladies and sat himself down by his wife and mother-in-law, while Lucy read the "*Lady of the Lake*" by the window. But she could not help attending to the trio across the room. They were talking in a low tone, in a mysterious way. Lucy was certain they were talking about her ; she could hear something about "he," and "they both," and "he looked," and "I am not certain," and "settle it," from Mrs. Hatton.

She felt like a naughty little girl sent into the corner in disgrace, while her elders talk gravely about her misdemeanour.

Had Gus said anything? did they suspect her? How slowly the time passed ! and how her heart did beat when she heard her father's voice on the stairs ! He came in, and, looking round the room, said cheerfully—

“ Why, you are quiet here ! ” He seemed in a good humour, and that was a good sign. Gus followed close after him, caught sight of Lucy, hesitated for a second, and then came towards her. Lucy laid down her book and gave him a smile of welcome, for which he inwardly thanked her with his whole heart.

“ What are you reading ? ” he asked, in a voice audible to every one.

“ Oh, only Scott,” also audibly.

“ Oh, ah ! It’s rather good, is it not ? ”

“ Yes, I think so ; I like him.”

Gus talked in such a matter-of-fact way that Lucy’s heart soon ceased its abnormal beating. She felt relieved by his presence, and she in her turn thanked him in her own mind for his tact and diplomacy ; for she knew instinctively that —let me see, one, two, three—eight ears were listening to their conversation, and all they heard were a few meaningless words about Sir Walter Scott’s poems ! Really these two were proceeding like correctly engaged young people, and Mrs. Golding, anxious to give them every advantage, proposed that Miss Lucy should sing something. And when she went obediently to the piano, Gus rose at once and followed her there, while Mrs. Hatton smiled complacently to herself, on the supposition that all this was her

doing ; and Mr. Golding glanced at the pair and then at his wife ; and Mr. Hatton looked at all the others, uncertain what attitude to take up.

At the piano, “ What shall I sing ? ” said Lucy.

“ Oh, anything you like,” replied Gus.

So she selected a small ditty and played a few chords on the piano.

Whereupon Gus, seeing his opportunity while the music would conceal his words, said in a whisper, “ I have talked with the governor ; it is all right,” which sentence so startled Lucy that she had only just sufficient presence of mind to prolong the overture to the song, and when she did sing she had probably very little idea what she was singing.

However, Gus reassured her by turning over the leaves with perfect coolness and some accuracy, considering he did not understand a single sign of the hieroglyphics before him.

Thus the evening passed easily enough, so that Lucy managed to keep up conversation with Gus and the others, though she was all the time curious to know what had passed between her father and her intended. So when Gus rose to take his leave, and had finished shaking hands with the others, and talking in

a conventional way about their projects for the autumn, where they were going to, and the rest of it, and when he turned to Lucy, putting out his hand to bid adieu, she gave him hers and said in the gentlest of whispers, "Can I speak to you?" The others were talking together and could not hear the question.

Gus was rather taken aback, but his diplomatic training happily helped him sufficiently to enable him to say, audibly, "Are you coming downstairs?"

"Yes, if you like," she answered, and they walked together to the door. Mr. Golding was going to follow, but receiving a look from Gus, and divining the situation, he stopped and began saying something to his wife; for, you see, Mr. Golding, though a banker, had some knowledge of finesse. So the young couple went out of the room by themselves, and as soon as they were on the stairs Gus said—

"What is it?"

"I wanted to know what papa said," she asked, timidly.

"Oh, he was awfully jolly! He said he would do just what you wished, and he said he only wanted you to be happy," replied Gus.

"Oh, I know he does," Lucy said, looking at Gus.

“ And he said,” continued Gus, “ that so long as I did the same I could do what I pleased. So it is all arranged, you see, and you need not trouble yourself any more about it.”

They were now in the hall, and Gus took down his overcoat and began putting it on. Old Robert, who was fumbling about in the neighbourhood of the hall, and had come forward on hearing some one descend, discreetly withdrew on hearing the pair together.

“ Is that all you wanted ? ” asked Gus, thrusting his hand through his coat-sleeve.

“ Yes, that is all, and I am very much obliged to you.”

“ Oh, it is of no consequence ” (struggling into his coat). “ The governor will see you, I expect.”

“ Did you give him any reasons ? ” she asked.

“ I simply told him that we thought I was not yet settled, you know—just what Madame de Woronzow told me. I said,” added Gus, looking up at the lamp in the hall, “ that we might know one another better as we went on.”

Silence. Lucy was young, and had not calculated on the advantages she would give Gus by this little *tête-à-tête*—advantages of which Gus made something, in a dainty, diplomatic way, not pressing them too much. Lucy began

to wish a third person would appear, but Robert kept in the background, and Mr. Golding simply forbade any one to leave the drawing-room till Gus had gone. So Gus had it all his own way.

“Well, good-night,” he said, holding out his hand. She gave him hers—he kept it. “Are you going abroad, do you think?” he inquired.

“I really don’t know yet,” she answered. She did not like to withdraw her hand; he seemed to have forgotten the fact that their hands were clasped together, though in reality he was perfectly aware of it.

“Perhaps I might join you somewhere,” he suggested. “If you don’t mind.”

“Oh yes, come if you like:” she thought he might go sooner if she was gracious. Not a bit of it.

“When shall you go?” he went on to ask.

“I don’t know, really—early next month, I should think.”

“Oh! Will you let me know when you leave town?”

“Yes.” She made a feeble effort to free her hand, without success. Really, she wished he would go; somebody might see them, and it would look so absurd.

Gus gave the hand a squeeze.

“Good-bye, then, for the present,” he said.

“Good-bye,” she answered. Then he let her hand go. She was going to run upstairs, when he arrested her by asking:—

“Shall I see you again soon?”

“Yes, if you like.”

“I am afraid of being a bore, you know—coming too often.”

“Oh dear no.”

“Would it be inconvenient on Saturday?”

“N—no.”

“I will look in on Saturday, then. Good-night,” and he insisted on shaking hands again.

“Good-night,” she said.

“Good-night,” he repeated; “you had better not stand in the draught.”

But she stood still in the hall, and Gus walked to the door, and then Robert appeared suddenly to open the door, whereupon Lucy fled upstairs.

Robert opened the door deferentially, and sped the parting guest and lover with a cheery “Good-night, sir.”

He thought to himself that the young gentleman was not such a fool as he looked, while he closed the door.

When Lucy went back to the drawing-room Mrs. Golding asked if Gus had gone, and on

Lucy answering in the affirmative Mr. Golding said, "Oh ! is he ? Well, I suppose you saw him safe off."

Then all the rest bolted out of the room, leaving the old gentleman and Lucy together.

He was just closing the window, and Lucy was following the others, when he called her back—"Lucy, one moment ; I want to say a word to you."

She stood still.

"My dear Lucy, has he told you what we have been talking about ?"

"Yes, papa."

"And you really wish your engagement to be prolonged, my dear ?"

"Yes, papa, if you consent."

"If you really think it is best I have no objection," he said gravely.

"Yes, I think so," she answered.

"Very well, be it so. Come, give me a kiss, and let your old father see you happy."

She came to be kissed by the hard old face.

"You are always good to me, papa," she said looking up to him, half smiling, half in tears.

"I pet and spoil you, if that's what you mean," he answered, patting her head. "Now be off to bed, and dream of wedding cakes."

## CHAPTER IV.

## MRS. GOLDING'S STRATEGY.

MRS. HATTON, it may be imagined, was ill-satisfied with the arrangement which had been agreed upon by the high contracting parties concerning the treaty of marriage between Mr. Fipps and Miss Lucy Golding. She declared that it would end in the engagement being broken off altogether, and this was a consummation which Mrs. Hatton by no means devoutly wished for. For it must be understood that Mrs. Hatton was bent on seeing this marriage concluded. She wished, above all things, to be connected with the nobility; to be the sister-in-law of the second son of a Viscount would at once establish her claim to be considered one of the aristocracy of England, than which can there be a higher ambition?

There are people who seek after the plain accumulation of cash; there are who wish but to ride in a brougham or a Victoria—vulgarity pure and simple; there are who follow after the pleasures

of this world, the unmitigated gratification of the senses ; there are who cultivate the singularities of "high art," and the æstheticism of obscure literature. These are but paltry aims when all is said ; to become a peer or peeress of the realm is indeed the height of human ambition. The soldier of fortune or of interest aims at being Field-Marshal *Lord A.* ; the verbose lawyer hopes one day to be named Baron Xminster of Xminster ; the bore or the laughing-stock of the House of Commons may hope some day to be relegated by some Minister to another place, where, one may say, "The wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." And the merchant plods through his daily task of fleecing somebody else in the hope that he may be called at the last day Sir Something Somebody, and see his name in "Debrett's Peerage." And so Mrs. Hatton, being a person of high ambition, aimed at seeing herself intituled, in print, "The Lady Barbara Hatton." It was, therefore, of the utmost importance to her that this marriage should be a *fait accompli*.

"If you will settle it with Gus, I will undertake to make Lucy agree to a day," she said to her father.

But the head of the house of "Goldings" would not hear of it.

"No, no," he said, "I am not afraid of Gus; he is ready to come to the scratch any time. And let Lucy take her own time about it." So spake the head of the firm, and he was silently seconded by the second partner—I mean Mrs. Golding, who, though a quiet and homely body in her way, had no mean influence in the affairs of the firm, that let me inform you.

There had been a certain curtain lecture delivered of an exceedingly mild sort, and this lecture had completely convinced Mr. Golding that he had done right, and that the dearest of dear children must be left to follow her own course in this instance, and they must on their side leave it to time to do away with that something—"something queer about her, Lizzie, you may take your oath to it," the chairman had said in returning thanks for the interesting lecture.

So Mrs. Hatton had to yield to the majority, declaring, nevertheless, that they would find she was right in the end. And she consoled herself by delivering a discourse on her own account, in the middle of which, I believe, her audience, Mr. H., fell asleep and snored, giving one more proof to his spouse that he was little better than a fool, and that without her (Mrs. Hatton) he would never "get on" at all in the world.

But Lucy's mother, for her part, was not content with merely speaking; she acted on her lecture, in which she differed somewhat from many lecturers who please us in the lecture-hall and do nothing out of it.

The reason for this is, perhaps, that as clerical preachers sometimes preach somebody else's sermons, so lay preachers are apt to borrow ideas from others, and lecture on them, but having no original ideas of their own they become in themselves monotonous.

It is certainly difficult to bring one's ideas into action, and I admit that Mrs. Golding took some days to form her plan and decide upon carrying it out. But when she did decide, she effected a really bold stroke.

One afternoon, when Lucy had gone out shopping with her sister, Mrs. Golding put on her bonnet and a little black lace shawl, and quietly walked over to Rose Lodge. She was rather alarmed at her own temerity, and expected, as she heard Peter coming to the door, that he would look rather taken aback at her appearance. Perhaps Peter was inwardly surprised, but he replied in a grave low voice that Madame was at home, and held the door open for Mrs. Golding. He ushered her into the drawing-room, and noiselessly closed the door thereof

after hearing the caller's name. In a minute he returned to say that Madame was engaged at present, but would be in the drawing-room directly. With that he again closed the door noiselessly, and left Mrs. Golding alone.

She had time to collect her thoughts a little, and prepare her speech for the occasion, before she heard voices outside, and immediately the Countess entered.

"I hope you will excuse my keeping you here," she said, shaking hands, "but I had to get rid of my man of business."

"I fear I have intruded on you."

"Not at all, I had just finished with him when you arrived, and I had only to send him away politely. And how is Mr. Golding?"

Mr. Golding was quite well.

"And Mrs. Hatton and Lucy?"

Mrs. Hatton was very well, and Lucy——

Then Mrs. Golding began,—"I wished to speak to you about Lucy. I am anxious about her, and I thought you might be able to tell me if anything was amiss. I believe, and I am glad of it, that you are in her confidence."

Mrs. Golding here looked up appealingly, and found the Countess's fine eyes fixed upon her.

"I do not know anything about her that I

cannot tell you," said Madame. " What do you wish me to tell you ? "

Then Mrs. Golding related her story—how she had noticed that Lucy was not happy, how she had feared that her engagement with Mr. Fipps was distasteful to her, and that she was attached to another. She said that she had perceived that she admired Count Jagellon ; she had noticed that she was much interested in him ; and she feared her admiration for him might be growing into a deep attachment.

" Yes, it is so," replied the Countess ; " she has grown very fond of him, and I may tell you that her affection is not returned—happily, I think, for her. Very soon after I made her acquaintance, I divined that she was in love with somebody, and not Mr. Fipps. She soon tacitly revealed to me that it was the Count, and I made his acquaintance in order to see what sort of man he was, and if it was possible for her to marry him. I think now it is hopeless. Count Jagellon is a countryman of mine, Mrs. Golding —a Pole—and he inherits from his father certain aspirations which render it dangerous, nay impossible, for any lady to be engaged to him. Besides, he is scarcely fit for your daughter in other respects ; he plays, and lives about town. I have therefore told Lucy plainly that she

must give him up, and bear her trial patiently. I think you will agree with me."

"Oh yes. Indeed, I am very thankful to you. And what would you advise me to do about Lucy herself—about her engagement, I mean?"

"Oh, keep it on, by all means. I hope in time she may grow to like Gus better. He is, I know, very fond of her, and I am sure would be a good husband to her."

"Yes, so we think, my husband and I."

"I will take care *he* does not see her," proceeded the Countess. "In fact, I have as good as cut him already, and I do not think he can see her except by my means."

"And would you advise me to take her away?" Mrs. Golding asked.

"No, I think not. Do not oppose her, or seem to oppose her, too much; only take care she does not go to any party or place of amusement where she is likely to meet him."

"Yes, I will. Believe me, Madame, I am very grateful to you for all you have said and done, and I can never repay you for your goodness to Lucy."

"Do not think of it. I am very sorry for her, and for you too, for it must be a trouble to you. I hope you will let me help you if I can do anything in the case."

"I am sure you can do anything with her ; she is very fond of you."

"And so am I fond of her."

And then the interview ended, the Countess saying she hoped to be able to call upon Mrs. Golding before leaving town.

When she came home, Mrs. Golding felt that her inspiration had been a good one ; she now knew all the facts of the case, and knew how to act in it. She determined to tell her husband the whole story, and she imparted it to him in a second lecture, at which Mr. Golding was much move. He came downstairs on the following morning rather late for breakfast, and went away to business very silent and grave.

When he returned from the City in the evening he told his wife that he thought they had better consult Barbara about it, and accordingly the married daughter was summoned to a secret conclave in the library. When Mrs. Hatton heard the story she seemed quite incredulous. The Countess must be mistaken—when had the pair ever met ?

"Well, you know, he behaved so well in that affair in the Row, why that might turn a girl's head," remarked Mr. Golding.

"But Count Jagellon is not at all the sort of man to take a fancy to a girl like Lucy. Such

men only care for grown women of the world," said Mrs. Hatton.

"A girl," said Mrs. Golding softly, "can love without her affection being returned."

"Yes, you're right, Lizzie," returned her husband.

But Mrs. Hatton could not get over it; it was preposterous, absurd, she said.

"However," she added, with a sort of chuckle, "I will soon put a stop to it. We will take Lucy away from London for six months, or a year, or two years, if you like. I will tell you what I will do. I'll make Henry take his holidays now, and we will go abroad at once. We can make an excuse of his having to go away now instead of later in the year, then you can join us afterwards, mamma, and stay the winter in the south of France."

"I don't know whether it would be well to force her to be separated," remarked Mrs. Golding dubiously.

"It is the only safe way of putting an end to this silly business," replied Mrs. Hatton.

"Yes, it's better she should not have a chance of seeing him," said Mr. Golding; and his wife had to give way, and the matter was so arranged.

Then it was announced to Lucy that Mr.

and Mrs. Hatton were going abroad next week, and she was to go with them. For the next few days the whole house was in confusion with packing, and getting in travelling gear, and studying and disputing over Bradshaw, so that Lucy had barely time to walk over to Rose Lodge to bid Theodora good-bye.

“I had no idea you were going so soon,” said Theodora.

“Nor I. I am afraid they suspect something, Dora dear, and want me to go away. It can’t be helped. You will write to me, darling, as often as you can, won’t you? I shall be thinking of you all the time I am away; and him,” she added, sighing.

Theodora promised she would write every week at least, on condition that her letters were answered.

“And you will tell me a little about him, dear?” pleaded Lucy.

“I will tell you what I can, dearest.”

And then they threw their arms round each other, and kissed with tears.

And so Lucy departed on the following day (being Tuesday), and the horrid rushing train took her away from London, and home, and Rose Lodge, and every one she loved best in the world.

## CHAPTER V.

## JAGELLON SURRENDERS.

Two days after Miss Golding's departure for the Continent, that is to say, the Thursday in what is called in *Turf* circles the Brighton week, Jagellon walked into the Club late in the evening, when nearly all the members—and there were but few of them there—had finished dinner and the servants were clearing away the fragments that remained.

“Here, Robins,” he said to one of the servants, “just get me some dinner, will you?—and be quick about it.”

“Yes, my Lord. What will you have, my Lord?”

“Oh, a steak and some soup—mulligatawny, if you have any; and some devilled kidneys, and anything else you like; and a couple of champagne.”

“Yes, my Lord.”

Jagellon threw himself down on a chair and watched gloomily the table being cleared for his dinner.

Jagellon had lost heavily at Goodwood and at Brighton. He might have said, like Pyrrhus : “Another such week, and I shall be ruined altogether.”

The horses which the clever men calculated were to win had persisted in being second or nowhere in the races, and some incalculable animal had inadvertently passed the post first.

So Jagellon, sick of his ill-luck after seeing the Brighton Cup lost by the horse he backed, had fled to London, and now made his appearance at the Cocoa Club, tired and grimy with travelling. The fact of his being dirty appeared to annoy him : he got up hastily from his chair and went into the lavatory.

When he returned his dinner was ready for him. He ate course after course hastily, taking no pleasure in his repast, and washing down the viands with frequent libations to Bacchus.

His dinner finished, he left for the smoking-room. The room was almost deserted, and he was surprised at being greeted with—

“Hullo, Jagellon ! you here ?”

“Hullo, Gus !”

“Thought you were at Brighton.”

“So I *was* ; just come from that d—d hole !”

“Awful bad racing, was it not ?”

"Oh, d—d bad! All the good things went down like ninepins, and no one there worth talking to, much less flirting with."

He sat himself down by Gus. "Brandy" he ordered the servant to bring.

"What are you doing here?" he asked of Gus.

"Nothing, my dear fellow; I'm a solitary pelican in the wilderness here—absolutely every one I know is out of town."

"I suppose so; all the better, I think. 'Pon my honour, it's enjoyable to be away from everybody."

"Rather melancholy, all the same. I am going to Rosencranz's week after next. Countess Woronzow's to be there."

"Oh, is she?" said Jagellon, finishing his brandy. "Here, James, bring me a brandy-and-soda, will you? Where is she now?" asked Jagellon.

"Don't know; out of town, of course."

"And *la belle*, where is she?" meaning Miss Golding.

"In Italy by this time, I expect. She left on Tuesday, with Mr. and Mrs. Hatton."

"Oh, ah!" said Jagellon, mechanically.

It has been said that man is a gregarious animal, and here, to prove the statement, was

Jagellon, clinging like a drowning person to Gus for companionship, after flying from all his other intimates.

The conversation grew more and more confidential and egotistical, over a bottle of Pommeroy, which Jagellon had proposed and Gus accepted.

"I'll tell you what, Gus. I have a good mind to cut the whole thing, get married, and turn good."

"Why not?" replied Gus. "A fellow must marry some time, and you'd have no difficulty about it."

"I'm blessed if I know who would have me."

"Oh, marriage is easy enough, if you are not particular."

"Ah, it's all very well for you to say that; you're a d—d lucky fellow, Gus!"

"Am I, by Jove? I wouldn't mind changing with you any day. Why, any woman falls in love with you, and I am hanged if any woman ever got up a passion on my account!"

"Why, hang it all! you have got as nice a girl as you could possibly find for your wife. What more do you want?"

"I'm not married yet," said Gus.

"Well, you soon will be. You must bide your

time, of course. I wish I had half your chances, I would turn over a new leaf to-morrow."

"My dear fellow," said Gus, puffing out a wreath of smoke from his cigar, "there are lots of pretty girls who would be only too glad to marry you. Mind you, the marriage market is not so much 'rigged,' as those City fellows call it, as it was a year or two ago. There are plenty of women glad to pay five hundred a year to be called Countess, and you could make up the rest."

"I don't know that," said Jagellon, thoughtfully.

"Well, you could make up seven or eight hundred a year between you, anyhow, and you can live comfortably on that, with connections. I know a man with not more than six hundred a year who's got a nice house, dines out often, gives little dinners, and lives as jolly as can be, and with as nice a little wife as you like."

Jagellon was silent. And when they rose to leave the Club together, they continued talking about their private affairs, as they strolled home-wards, and because confidence begets confidence, therefore Gus told how his engagement was still on, and how he was waiting to be settled at the F. O., and that he hoped he should not have to wait much longer.

" You are a d—d lucky fellow, Gus," was Jagellon's last words on the subject. " I should not mind being in your place."

When Jagellon reached his rooms he sat down to a cigarette, and a last glass of brandy-and-soda, while he considered the conversation that had passed between himself and Gus. Was there not a great deal of truth in what Gus had said? Were there not many girls (if he did not look too high) who would not say " No " to being mated with such a man as himself? And had not Madame de Woronzow herself offered him wife, and money, and position, and her friendship? Fool, that he was! he had rejected her offer: for what reason? For a vague impossibility, a chimera, some sort of grand ideal impossible to realize. Her friendship. Was there anything more precious that he could have? Fool! fool, that he had been! Now he had lost it for ever, perhaps. He might regain it—it was for him to ask her pardon, and beg her to renew her offer.

He would write to her.

He searched about his room, found pen, ink and paper, and sat down to write.

" Dear Countess." Perhaps that was too free and easy, considering that he had offended her.

“My dear Countess” (on a fresh sheet), “I have thought over the subject which we talked about when I last saw you, and I have come to the conclusion that I was a fool to reject your offer. I therefore place myself at your disposal, and shall esteem myself happy——” By the bye, was he certain that she would still offer him the marriage she had proposed? By no means.

So he began on another sheet of paper—

“My dear Countess, I should be glad if you would allow me to call upon you——” Stop—was she in town? Confound it all! He tore up his futile attempts at letter-writing, and went to bed, resolving to tell Watkins to see next day if the Countess was out of town, and where she was to be found. Jagellon also remembered that he had not heard from Mr. Mentzel as to the proposal that he had made to him.

His pictures had been framed very neatly, but Mr. Mentzel had only said privately, on bringing the pictures, that the subject was still under discussion, and that he would not be able to let Count Jagellon know what decision his friends had come to for another week or so. Jagellon decided that he had better see Madame de Woronzow first and tell her all about it. Frankness, he considered, would pay

the best with her, and he had better tell her all he had done and leave it to her to decide his fate.

So on the following evening Watkins went over to Rose Lodge, somewhat sulkily. Watkins considered himself an aggrieved person ; he had been abruptly summoned from the charms of Brighton, the festive and interesting gatherings at the "Ship," and a series of delicate manœuvres in the betting ring. Watkins, unlike his master, had been tolerably successful in his recent dealings on the Turf, and had looked forward to a final *coup* at Lewes, of which *coup* he considered he had been unjustly deprived. Watkins, therefore, went over to Rose Lodge, and rang sulkily at the garden door.

"Ah, Mr. Watkins!" exclaimed Peter, on appearing, "I thought you were at Brighton."

"Wish I was. Is missis at home?"

"Yes, Madame is in. Have you any message for her?"

"No, he only wanted to know she were here."

"She will not leave till the week after next. And how are your affairs going on, Mr. Watkins?"

"Bad, very bad. I wish I were you, Peter, there! A place like yours is something to

talk about. Look at me, lugged about from pillar to post—never know where I may be going to-morrow.. Well, well, I'll stick by him. Dang me! I'll stick by him to the end, and it won't be long a-coming neither."

" Why, does he spend so much money ? "

" Look ye here—if he been and lost anything under five thousand pounds I'll eat my hat. Why, he lost one monkey, I know, for I heerd him lay it over the Stakes. If he'd arsked me, I could ha' told 'im th' horse wouldn't win. He went fishy in the rooms the night afore."

Had Mr. Watkins conversed in Greek, or Sanscrit, he would probably have been better understood by his companion ; but, as it was, Peter gathered that some horse belonging to the Count had fallen ill and died, and in consequence the Count had been unable to win in a race.

" And the games they used to carry on at night," said Watkins, continuing his narration. " Cards, and dice, and wine till three, four, and *seven* o'clock. That were on the Cup day—no, the night afore the Cup. There was him, and Muster Hudson, and Lord Thryburgh, and Lord Uttoxeter, and—let me see, there were Mr. A. and Sir John B. ; that were all, I think. They all dined together at the place where master was

staying. They set to at cards about ten o'clock, then they orders supper at one o'clock, devilled birds and salmon cutlets, and I don't know what all. I went in to wait on 'em. The Count, he were taking off his glasses of wine as fast as you like. He'd been winning, so it seemed, him and Mr. Hudson, and they was in a jolly humour. Well, they dropped cards a bit and went in for reg'lar gaming with dice. I heard t' Count lay a thousand to a hundred on one throw, and won it too. But he lost a lot of money afterwards. Him and Muster Hudson and Lord Thryburgh kep it up till seven o'clock. He walks into my room just about that time (I'd gone to bed, you see), and his hair were a-hanging over his forehead, and he had got it dark under the eyes. Gad ! he did look wild like. He shook me up. 'Here, get my bath ready !' says he ; 'look sharp.' 'Ain't yer going to bed, my Lord,' says I. 'No, damn !' says he, 'I shall lie down and drink a cup of coffee,' says he ; 'that'll pull me together,' he says. 'I've got to breakfast at Lady E.'s at nine, and drive 'em over if my hands is steady enough,' he says. 'Curse those cards—a pretty lot of money I've lost this morning,' says he. And blessed if he ever went to bed at all, and he drove the four'-n.

'and over too. He's the best man I ever saw for going to the devil fast."

"Ah, it is a great pity!" said Peter, who had listened most attentively to Watkins's story. "Such a fine man he is."

"That's true. P'raps them as is a-driving of him to the devil will be sorry for it when he blows his blessed brains out—that's what it 'll come to."

"You mean his companions will be sorry for him," said Peter.

"No, I don't mean his companions, as you calls 'em," replied Watkins, facing Peter with his hands in his tight pockets. "Nor I don't mean Mr. Hudson, nor I don't mean Lord Thryburgh, nor I don't Sir John B., that's all. You know who I mean."

Peter protested he had not the least idea whom Mr. Watkins was alluding to

"Then you'd better find out—Good mornin'"—and Watkins walked slowly away.

Peter looked gravely after him for a minute or two, then turned into the garden and shut the door softly.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE FÊTE AT THE EQUALITY CLUB.

HERE they are, all coming back pell-mell. Victoria Station is full of big men and pretty ladies on this Saturday morning; the bulk of Society is rushing back to London, only to rush through it. For it is the 12th of August next week, and sportsmen have only just time to hurry up to Scotland and get their guns ready, and the pretty ladies are anxious to be in at the death of the grouse. The fanatical votaries of the Turf are still at or near Lewes, determined on going through the racing to the bitter end. But many of these intend coming up by the afternoon express to be present at the banquet at the Equality Club. For this fête has been the main topic of conversation at Goodwood and Brighton; fierce have been the struggles to obtain a ticket of invitation; intricate the intrigues to procure admission. Nay, the Club has had generously to extend the select number of its *invités*; instead of eighty

there is to be a banquet of over a hundred, and the Club is to bear the extra expense.

General Bagrathion has paid a thousand down, they say, for the banquet alone. Never has the General been so busy ; carriages driving up to his hotel ; messengers hurrying in and out ; his ante-room filled with a constant levée of suppliants ; and Willaume, his secretary, writing polite notes and enclosing tickets all day long. Verily, the General thinks war is not such hard work as fashion ; and the General is at present the rage—for everybody considers this fêté to be the wind-up of the London season. After this, everybody will start for the four corners of the world, leaving London to its fate, which is foretold by the present murkiness and dust of the city—prognostics of future fogs.

So, I say, Victoria Station is a scene of bustle and confusion—full of carriages, and footmen, and horses, and flying porters with their trollies, and heated guards.

The ladies are anxious to get home to change their dresses for “louder” and more piquant toilettes. It is eleven o’clock now, and the fêté definitely begins at two in the afternoon. Already, at this time, there is a coach starting from the Cocoa Club, with General Bagrathion, and Jagellon, and Mr. Hudson, and a lot of

them, seated on the top, all dressed in the newest of clothes, and wearing white hats most of them, as the day is bright and hot. The driver, Lord Thryburgh, cracks his whip over the horses, the grooms let go their heads, and away they go, up the street, and along Piccadilly, with the horn merrily blowing, and omnibuses and cabs obsequiously making way for the aristocratic vehicle.

While we are on our way it will be as well to give a short description of the Equality and its *habitués*.

The "Equality" is so called, I believe, because all its members are equal in the Club and have equal privileges, of whatever rank, position, or wealth they may be. Any man who can fairly claim to be in the best society may belong to this Club, whether he be Peer, Knight, Squire, Rajah, Pacha, Mandarin, or of any other of the world's innumerable titles. The abode of the Club is a house of red brick, three stories high, and with extensive wings, one of these being entirely devoted to a saloon or ball-room, and a considerable portion of the other to a billiard-room. The house stands on an elevated terrace, a flight of broad marble steps leading to the gardens at the back.

At the bottom of the garden there is a pretty little lake, with a small and bushy island, con-

taining a fountain in the centre. There is a little boat, to row round the lake, a pastime which is somewhat soothing, especially under the weeping willows, on the side farthest from the house. The grounds belonging to the house are very extensive, consisting, in fact, of many acres, and comprising croquet lawn, the same for tennis, shooting-ground, cricket-field, and many little walks, and orchards, and arbours. The property is surrounded, I believe, entirely by a high wall; but it is more completely secluded by a thick growth of trees and shrubs planted all round the grounds, so that when you enter the iron gates of the Club you are, as it were, quite cut off from the world, for the very drive by which you enter takes a sudden turn round a dense shrubbery, and you lose sight at once of the entrance. And through these gates, on this Saturday afternoon, drove carriages of every description—the “still deep” brougham, the gay waggonette, and the aristocratic four-in-hand.

And the occupants of these carriages!

It may have been remarked by the aspirant of Society, that there are far too many—well, plain—women in high circles, and he may have been troubled in spirit to find, where he expected all beauty, and elegance, as a rule, ugliness and

pleased, and say nearly everything they wished.

The Countess, on making her appearance, was soon surrounded by a small court of admirers, both of the masculine and feminine gender, and then Bagrathion, having allowed his principal guest, as he considered her, to be sufficiently admired, took her off to the shooting-ground, the vicinity of which was made apparent by the occasional reports of guns. The Countess was, luckily, just in time to witness the conclusion of the first and principal sweepstakes. Bagrathion made her stand a little to the right of the two men who were to shoot off the final tie ; they were Jagellon and a tall, lanky, dark-haired man. The lanky man had proposed to divide the stakes, about fifty pounds in value, but Jagellon had refused, saying he meant to back his luck, and had at once accepted a bet of three to one in "fivers" against himself from Mr. Hudson.

As the Countess came up he was standing apart at his post, carefully examining his gun, and she heard him cock it with a click. A dead silence followed while he stepped up to his mark. Suddenly a pigeon flew upwards from the trap a little way off ; a shot—the pigeon flew upwards ; another shot—it fluttered, fluttered, and dropped to the ground.

“It’s beyond.” “No, it’s a hit,” were amongst the cries that followed on the shot.

The Countess looked at Jagellon—he was standing perfectly still, his gun under his arm, twirling his moustache. Then there was a cry of “It is a hit,” as a man by the traps raised his hand.

“It must be just within the ground, then,” remarked Mr. Hudson.

Then the lanky man stepped forward; again a pigeon flew, again the report of a gun. The bird dropped, wavered, then fluttered slowly to the ground.

“Missed, missed,” said every one.

“Where’s your bet?” said Jagellon, turning round to Mr. Hudson. Instantly, by this action, he saw Madame de Woronzow. He was just going to walk away; he stood stockstill, as if he also had been shot like a pigeon. She nodded to him, and then he came straight to her. He raised his hat mechanically, as it were; his eyes and thoughts were fixed on her alone.

“You here?” he said.

“I am,” she replied, giving him her hand, “*in propriâ personâ*. So this is the way you make money, is it, by killing these pretty birds?”

“I never dreamt of seeing you here,” he said, without attending to her words, for he was occupied with looking at her, and his eyes sparkled as he looked.

“Ah! you see I always turn up when I am not expected.” Then she turned to greet the other men who came to do homage to her. After graciously accepting their obeisance, she said to General Bagrathion, “Now, General, I will release you for the present from your arduous task of being my guide. Count Jagellon here shall do penance for his iniquitous victory.”

Jagellon stepped to her side. “Here, Hudson, take my gun, will you?” he said.

“Just as you please,” said the General to Madame; “I am at your service.”

“*You* can try your hand now,” she answered. “I shall go and sit down in the garden, and make Count Jagellon entertain me till you come.”

“Very well,” said Bagrathion. “*Au revoir!* then.”

“*Au revoir!*”

She took Jagellon’s arm, and they sauntered away together.

As soon as they had left the field and had entered a shady walk leading round the grounds,

the Countess began, after some desultory conversation, to speak as follows :—

“There is one thing I like in you, Count—you never flatter.”

“Why should I?” said he.

“Precisely,” she went on. “It shows a *certain* amount of honesty in you which is commendable.”

He did not quite like the tone in which she said this; there was a chillness in it.

“Why—what do you mean?” he asked.

“Well, you see, I always fancied I was a person of some influence, and I thought other people—you, for instance—had the same idea. And yet I find you consider yourself able to go to Mr. Mentzel, and intrigue with him behind my back without my knowing of it.”

“Has he told you?”

“Of course he has,” she answered dryly; “he was obliged to tell me; in fact, I believe he was *ordered* to ask my advice about you.”

“Well, and what did you say?” (equally dryly.)

“I advised him to refuse you, in a month or so, if you still persisted at the end of that period.”

They walked on in silence for a little way. Somehow she had let go his arm, and they were now walking separately, side by side.

“Upon my word,” he said, suddenly, “I think you are the hardest and coldest woman I ever met with.”

“Ah, don’t begin flattering me now.”

“You want to rule every one, do you? you will have me at your mercy?—very well. Do with me what you like: marry me if you wish it, I don’t care.”

“Did I say I wished to *marry* you, as you express it?” She was laughing, the horrid beautiful woman.

“I was going to write to you—that is, I tried to write to you—to tell you I would submit to your offer.” He stopped in the path and changed his tone. “Let me be your friend, your distant acquaintance, anything—anything so that I can see you now and then, sometimes, year by year—so that I may still know some one who wants me to be a little better than I am.”

She stood looking straight before her; when he ended she walked on, and he followed slowly by her side.

“Well,” she said, “I think I have changed my mind—I do not think you are good enough for the match I had intended for you.”

“I seem to grow worse in your opinion every time I see you,” he said. “What have I done?

How have I offended you? At least you might let me know my fault."

"Pigeon-shooting, for instance."

He looked round quickly at her; she was looking on the ground gravely, only there was a little twitching of her mouth.

He seized her hand that was holding up her dress. "Ah! you are laughing at me" (her face was already dimpled with smiles). "You do not believe me! Never mind, only be the same Countess Woronzow, and you may plague me as much as you please."

By this time they had come to one of the summer-houses, an octangular building, with frescoes painted on its walls, and nice cushioned seats round the inside of it; from here there was a pretty view through intervening boughs of the house and garden, and the marquee and the people.

"Let us sit down here," she said, "I am tired." So he led her into the bower, and she sat down, he standing before her by the entrance.

"Now let us talk seriously," she began. "Don't you think you have made a fool of yourself?"

"Very possibly; men generally do."

"What am I to do with you? You are my countryman, you see, so I must do what I can,

and what can one do for a man who is only capable of gambling and betting?"

"I will leave off cards and everything if you wish it. I do not care about that—it is only because I have nothing better to do."

"Yes, I dare say. I know the value of promises of that sort."

"Very well. Say the word, and if you ever hear of me playing cards again cut me altogether."

"As if you were a pack of cards" (laughing). "I should not like to risk it."

"Well, try me then."

"We will see about it. Are you going to turn into a good young man, then, and not gamble or do anything naughty any more?"

"I will turn into anything you wish me to be, so long as I gain your favour."

"Ah! you will have hard work to do that. You will have to begin at the beginning and mount up, and up, and up, slowly and painfully" (motioning with her hand).

"And when I get to the top—what then?"

"Oh, it will be time to talk about that when you get there."

At this point they despaired General Bagration and two other men, coming in search of them

“There is our host. I must go and make myself agreeable to him,” said Madame, and she rose from her seat. Jagellon directly offered his arm, which she took, and together they strolled towards the new-comers.

“And I may come and see you?” asked Jagellon.

“Yes, if you like,” she said, as she left him and went up to Bagrathion, adding as she looked back at the Count—“In a month or so. I am going out of town soon.” Then laughing she turned to the General, and walked with him towards the house, the other men following.

When they came to the lawn in front of the house Jagellon was claimed for a game at tennis, and Madame de Woronzow went off with General Bagrathion.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE COUP DE MAIN.

MADAME DE WORONZOW was in the most malicious humour that day—almost impish, if it were possible to apply such an epithet to the caprices of a handsome woman. She had not been looking on for long at the tennis-players when she declared that she would like to have a game. A number of players at once offered her their places, but she declined to break into any game, and insisted upon a net being provided for her own *partie*.

Then she coaxed General Bagrathion and Lord Uttoxeter, of all people in the world, to play, and she and the General opposed Lady B., who readily joined, and my Lord. Lady B. is a famous tennis-player, as every one knows, but she did not care in the least how she played on this occasion, and while she kept Bagrathion moving on the other side of the net, she took care that Uttoxeter should do most of the work on her side. Madame Woronzow, who, for the

rest, was little of a player, pursued the same tactics, and in consequence Lord Uttoxeter, who had perhaps considered it beneath his dignity to divest himself of his frock-coat, was no bad representative of Falstaff “larding the lean earth,” as he dodged about after the ball. Bagrathion, on the other hand, had sufficient wisdom to divest himself of his coat, and played in white waistcoat, fiercely and hotly, muttering secret curses between his teeth, and the ladies interrupted the game by frequent peals of laughter, provoked by the two men.

Lord Uttoxeter, however, took the teasing more good-naturedly than his fellow-sufferer, consoling himself by flirting with the charming Lady B., and by watching the jealous countenance of Mrs. Price, who was looking on at the game. At length, wearied rather with laughter than with the exercise, the ladies desisted from their game, and rested from their labours, sitting on garden-seats.

Then Madame Woronzow fastened on poor little Rosencranz, who had been talking “business” with anybody whom he could get to converse with him. Him Madame Woronzow drew on to explain to her all about the Stock Exchange, especially as to the meaning of the terms “bull” and “bear.” Everybody on the Exchange, the

Baron declared, was more or less of a "bear," to which Madame gravely replied, "Yes, I believe so." Then she asked naïvely whether he, Rosencranz, for instance, was a bull or a bear; and the notion of little round Rosencranz being either of those ferocious and shaggy animals appeared to tickle the risible nerves of the company to some extent. Finally, she completely "knocked the fellow out of time," as some man observed, by saying,

"You mentioned the word 'contango ; ' that's that Peruvian stuff, is it not ? "

And when the Baron, after looking puzzled for a moment, suddenly exclaimed, with a happy smile at his own acuteness, "Ah ! you mean *guano*," the Countess at last broke down and laughed out at him ; while Rosencranz was so mystified by the laughter around him, that he could only smile and smirk at the others, and repeat, "Yes, it is *guano* ; it is not the same thing."

The ringing of a bell to announce that the banquet was ready at last released the Baron from his tormentor.

Every one now made for the marquee, under which two gorgeously covered tables had been laid out.

In the centre of each table two splendid Cups

were placed, the trophies of Ascot or Goodwood, belonging to members of the Club. On the pedestal of one, an epergne filled with fruits and flowers, stood the Knight of Snowdoun, James Fitzjames, blowing his bugle, while at his feet lay his gallant steed ; and on the other side of the vase's stem stood the King of the Forest, ready to show his flying feet to his pursuers—

“ A moment gazed adown the dale,  
A moment snuff'd the tainted gale,  
A moment listened.”

Upon the other, a gold Cup, stood Atalanta poised on the lid, and turning to send back one contemptuous glance at her distanced competitor ; and engraven on the Cup Sthenelos and Diomedes seemed to race round the course.

Besides these two centre-pieces, smaller Cups decorated the table, together with tasteful Venetian glass ; and the tables seemed, on a general view, to be negligently bestrewn with flowers and different fruits, rich-smelling pine-apples, delicate-hued grapes, and pretty peaches and apricots.

The hangings of the marquee, you understand, had been taken away, leaving bare the Venetian poles, so that the banquet took place in the open air, in view of the house, and the

flowers, and the laburnums, and cedars of Lebanon. An impromptu kitchen had been set up in one of the small tents hard by, whence the hot soups and meats were conveyed to the table.

General Bagrathion sat at the head of one table, facing the house, and having on his right Madame de Woronzow and Lord Thryburgh ; on his left Sir John B. and Baroness Rosencranz, a big and placidly fat woman. Lord Uttoxeter was at the head of the other table with Lady B. and Rosencranz. You know it is one of the curious customs of society that husbands and wives shall be as much separated as possible, so there is Mrs. Guiness Price seated a little way down the principal table, just above the gold Cup, on the opposite side to Madame Woronzow, with Jagellon, who is carrying on a really dangerous flirtation with her, on her left hand. He appears to have caught the contagion of the Countess's malicious spirits ; and while the latter is now occupied in plaguing Bagrathion, declaring that he is quite a *bon vivant*, and that she does not believe in the hardships of modern campaigns, etc., till the General is on the point of quarrelling with her, and is only restrained by the thought that he will soon be able to pay her off—while, I say, this teasing goes on at

the head of the table, Jagellon carries on the the most reckless flirtation with Mrs. Price, to the amusement of everybody around, who, catching the fever of flirting, soon begin making play with their neighbours. Jagellon is seated on the left of Mrs. Price, so that as he keeps turning to her he can send a wicked glance up the table to Madame Woronzow, as much as to say, “How do you like my making love to Mrs. Price here ?”

Not unfrequently their eyes meet, and at last she catches the fever also, and, changing her tone, begins flirting with the General.

Bagrathion by this time has drunk too much wine to be conscious of any tricks of coquetry, and responds to the Countess with far too much earnestness for an over-dinner flirtation.

“ I shall keep this glass you have drunk out of,” says he ; “ let me fill it up once more and then give it me.”

“ What do you want it for ?” she asks.

“ Anything that your lips have touched is precious to me,” he says, looking into her eyes. She puts her head on one side. “ Fill it, then,” she says, laughing low.

He filled it with foaming wine, and a ring on his finger clinked against the glass as he raised the bottle ; his hand was shaking as he poured

her high spirits over dinner. She was scarcely conscious of General Bagrathion sitting down by her, of General Bagrathion talking in a low voice to her. He was certainly making love to her ; he was asking how long he was to wait, when she would take pity on him, &c. It was all very wearisome and oppressive.

“I shall go out of doors again,” she said ; “it is too hot here. I feel quite sleepy.”

“Supposing we go round the house,” suggested Bagrathion. “I know it pretty well now, and can show you some of its curiosities.”

“Very well,” she said languidly. She felt it was too much exertion to offer any objection.

They left the buzz of conversation, they walked through one or two silent rooms, the General all the time talking to her without her attending to or understanding much of what he said.

She remembered being in a room where were several men smoking, men in shirt-sleeves—a billiard-room probably. The room was flavoured with the aroma of strong cigars. “Bah !” she said, “this is disgusting. Let us go out.”

Bagrathion took her away directly.

Then they went along a corridor, a dark place so far as the Countess could recollect ; there were not sufficient windows in the place, and it was very close surely. It was here that the

Countess, as she was walking slowly on and leaning on Bagrathion's arm, felt a strange sensation in her head. She felt as if she had suddenly lost the power of thinking; for a moment she did not know where she was. The sensation came and went in a moment.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, stopping short and putting her hand to her forehead.

"What is it?" asked the General, looking hard at her.

"I felt quite giddy just now, for a moment; it has gone now."

"I am afraid you are fatigued; you had better come and lie down for a short time," suggested Bagrathion.

But now she began to feel, not faint, but drowsy and sleepy; involuntarily she closed her eyes, then started as the General said something about the cool of the evening. She answered him vaguely—she was growing uneasy. Could she have caught a fever? But she did not shiver, she had no headache, only she was very sleepy.

They were nearing the hall just then, there were some men there talking loudly, and she heard one of them saying, "I could drink it."

She repeated the words to herself twice, and then the truth flashed through her mind, causing

her to rouse herself to the utmost, and concentrate her whole mind on what was passing. She had been drugged ! Who had done it ? The wine, the wine ! The man who poured out the last glass of wine for her—the man beside her !

She was in his power ; he was leading her she knew not whither.

How could she escape ? She had no carriage, who could help her ?

These thoughts rushed through her brain, as she came into the hall. I said there were some men in the hall. Amongst them was Jagellon, who came towards her when he saw her.

“Are you going to begin dancing ?” he asked.

“No,” said Bagrathion, “Madame wishes to rest a little, she is tired.”

“I am so sorry,” said Jagellon.

“It is nothing,” she answered in a low voice.

She was passing on, when, quick as thought, she turned and clutched Jagellon’s arm.

“Get me a cab, or a carriage—quick !” she whispered, with a sudden flash of her eyes, and she walked on. It was done so rapidly, that Bagrathion had not time to see it, or hear the words. Jagellon stood still for a moment ; he was startled by the sudden command, then he

ran across the hall and disappeared through the open door.

Meanwhile General Bagrathion led the Countess into a library, and through that into a small room where there was a small couch sufficient for one person to lie on.

“Lie down here,” he said; “I hope you will soon be rested.”

She did as he told her; she already felt incapable of resistance, and they were quite alone. Bagrathion sat down by her and took one of her hands.

“Do you feel ill?” he said.

“No.”

He put his other arm round her to support her, as it were. He looked into her face with his fierce eyes. She was looking steadfastly at the wall opposite, holding her eyes open by main force of will.

He continued looking at her for some time—how long she did not know, but every second, every pulsation was marked by a fresh effort of her will to keep herself awake and resist him.

He raised her head and put his other arm round her, and by this movement their faces came close together—and he kissed her, pressing his moustache and lips roughly against her mouth.

“ What is it? ” she asked languidly.

“ I love you, darling.”

She dared not openly resist him, for she knew by instinct that she would only show her utter weakness and bring herself more completely into his power.

She only looked at him, concentrating all the resistance of her will into that look.

He turned his eyes away. She still looked at him.

Then—suddenly a noise of footsteps was heard not far off. Bagrathion rose to his feet and listened; she also listened with all her remaining strength.

The door of the adjoining room was opened with a bang.

“ Where the devil is she? ” exclaimed a man’s voice. Bagrathion made a step to the door to lock it. It was too late—the door was flung open, and Jagellon entered.

“ Oh, here you are. Hullo, are you ill? ”

Her head had fallen back on the sofa, her eyes were closed. She was utterly exhausted and helpless now, but saved, saved !

## CHAPTER VIII.

## HOMEWARDS.

IT was Jagellon who raised the Countess from the couch ; it was Jagellon who supported her while she walked from the room. He brought her to a private door leading into the grounds at the front of the house. He took her by an unfrequented path round some shrubberies, a path almost concealed from the house.

They were alone together, for he had despatched Bagrathion to get some brandy-and-water and bring it to the cab.

Jagellon was perfectly cool and collected, and gave his orders to the General in an authoritative manner, that could not but be obeyed, and he ordered Madame to walk as quickly as she could ; for she walked with difficulty, her head drooping on his shoulder as he supported her with his arm. She kept muttering some half incoherent sentences.

“Take me home—take home,” she said. “I have taken some’ing, mistake ; don’t let him

her to rouse herself to the utmost, and concentrate her whole mind on what was passing. She had been drugged ! Who had done it ? The wine, the wine ! The man who poured out the last glass of wine for her—the man beside her !

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He continued looking at her for some time—how long she did not know, but every second, every pulsation was marked by a fresh effort of her will to keep herself awake and resist him.

He raised her head and put his other arm round her, and by this movement their faces came close together—and he kissed her, pressing his moustache and lips roughly against her mouth.

And still the cab kept up its interminable jingle and jolt—now rattling through a suburban town, making its houses echo back the noisy rattle of the wheels on the paving stones of the streets, anon passing along dusty roads, under shady trees, through which the moon peeped and the evening star twinkled as the twilight waned and the August night crept on.

Jagellon had given up trying to keep her awakened ; they were nearing London he knew by this time, he could not do anything more for her, and it would soon be over. So she leant now against the back of the seat. He had taken off her hat, and her head lay dark against the velvet of the cab. Her eyes were closed, her lips set apart, her face was perfectly calm, and the colour of her cheeks had faded and left a death-like delicacy of hue on her face.

How beautiful she looked !

He sat watching her tenderly and anxiously ; his eyes wandered from the drooping eyelids, with their long black lashes, to the curves of her mouth and the pouting under lip.

How sweet to kiss that mouth ! It seemed just then merely made for kissing—to invite the touch of another's lips.

She would never know of it, she need never

be shamed by the thought of his lips having touched hers. As he looked he thought of the dimples in her cheek, and the whiteness of her teeth, as she had laughed at him in the garden. Now he could take his revenge on those naughty lips.

Was she not completely in his power? and is not all fair in love?

Involuntarily he bent forward his head.

The temptation was a strong one, she lay so quietly waiting for him, as it were.

After all it was rather unfair to take advantage of her helplessness. He would not dare to touch her in all her strength and power. And she had trusted herself to him; why? Perhaps because she thought he would be faithful to her.

So he put his arm round her in token of protection, and her head fell on his shoulder and rested there. He could feel the gentle breath from her lips. She was alive, and that was well.

They were now passing through busy streets, passing the flaring gas-lights of shops, surrounded by busy, hardworked folk buying their food for the morrow; passing swiftly frequent couples of young men and women, and groups of men merry with beer, who turned to

look at the rattling cab and the poor horse struggling bravely on.

Oh, they are nearing home now ; they have turned out of the main road ; a few minutes more and the faithful horse will have done his duty. She will soon be at home ; she is sleeping securely on her lover's shoulder. Is she not already at home ? Is there any place more safe for her than where she sleeps now ? Is there any stronger arm elsewhere to protect her, or any one to love her more in her prosperity, or be more faithful to her in her distress ?

Lovely eyes, sleep in peace, shaded by those dear eyelids ! sweet lips, breathe softly with measured breath, pure and untouched ! pretty head, lean confidently on that broad shoulder, not one of your silky hairs shall be harmed !

She is home at last, safe at home.

## CHAPTER IX.

## MR. WATKINS REPORTS PROGRESS.

I PASS over without detailing the dismay and astonishment of Peter and the other servants when their mistress was brought home insensible, and I need only say that her physician was at once sent for, and having arrived as quickly as his legs after a copious dinner could carry him, remained for a considerable time with the patient administering the necessary remedies.

Nor is it necessary to relate in detail how the cabman earned his £5, having done the distance in fifty minutes ; how Jagellon patted the poor old horse, who could only look at him with a self-satisfied air, feeling doubtless that he had done a really great thing, and how the Count earnestly recommended him to the care of the cabman.

“ All right, me lord,” the cabman had replied, considering that his munificent fare must be a lord. “ A dook or prince he were, and no

in mistake about it," he said afterwards to his mates, tankard in hand.

It should, however, be mentioned that the Count called again about ten o'clock that night to learn the condition of the Countess, and heard from Peter that he believed Madame was now asleep, and that Dr. Legge had informed him (Peter) that she would get on very well now, and he would see her again in the morning, and with this intelligence Jagellon departed, satisfied that no serious injury had been inflicted on his beautiful Countess.

The next morning, therefore, Mr. Watkins made his appearance, about eleven of the clock, at Rose Lodge, with a note from his master. "and I was to inquire particular how my lady was," he said.

"Madame is much better," answered Peter, "she is lying down in her boudoir. She does look rather pale, and she is weak, but that is all. I will take her your letter, and see if there is any answer."

So saying, Peter took the letter to Madame in her boudoir. It ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR COUNTESS,

"I have sent my man to learn how you are instead of coming myself, for fear you should

ask me in, out of sheer politeness. I hope to hear very good news of you, and if you are strong enough, will you write me just a line to prove that you are really better?

“I have some curious ideas in my head as to the cause of your present condition, which I will impart to you privately.

“I do not for a moment believe that you were the intended victim. I cannot believe that any man could be so inhuman as to attempt such an injury to you.

“If I am right in my conjecture we might punish the offender for his folly.

“Will you let me know when I may see you again as strong and well as ever?

“Yours very sincerely,

“JAGELLON.”

Having perused this letter, which she placed carefully in her pocket, Madame wrote the following note, which she gave to Peter:—

“MY DEAR COUNT,

“I am much better, quite well in fact, only rather weak still, and I am afraid I should have driven you from my doors had you come in person, as I have not very much ‘sheer politeness’ in my disposition. I shall, however, be

well enough to-morrow to receive you, and I will be 'not at home' to every one, so that you can impart your ideas to me.

"I reserve my thanks till I see you.

"Yours very faithfully,

"THEODORA WORONZOW."

With this note Peter went down to Watkins. "Will you give milord this?" he said, handing the letter to Watkins.

"Right you are. I say, Peter, what's the row, eh?"

"I don't know myself," answered Peter. "I only do know that Madame came home last evening very ill, and we did send for the doctor."

"Oh, that's it, is it?"

"Yes," added Peter, "milord did bring her home."

"Oh! he brought her home, did he?"

"Yes, in a cab."

"In a cab! Did yer see him, then?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"You didn't, it may be, remark anything queer about him, did yer?"

"No," answered Peter, rather astonished.  
"What for?"

"He didn't seem to you—now," continued Watkins, dropping his voice to a confidential

undertone, "between you and me, you know, he didn't appear to you a little *gone*?" putting his finger to his forehead.

"Gone?" repeated Peter.

"Yes, a little cracked, as it were," added Watkins, in the same tone.

"Cracked?" said Peter, unable to grasp the idea.

"You know what I mean," proceeded Watkins, earnestly. "Going in for the Colney Hatch business, eh?" Still Peter looked puzzled. "Fancying yourself no end of a swell, like the Emperor of Roosia or China—*you* know. Off his nut, as they say; kind of mad, as it were—you know what I mean."

"Mad!" repeated Peter, in surprise, having at length understood the other's meaning. "No, why should he be mad?"

"That's what gets me. He didn't seem as if he had been drinking, you see."

"He certainly had not been drinking when I saw him," said Peter.

"Nor I never see'd him drink nothing," returned Watkins, multiplying the negatives, possibly in order to give additional force to his statement.

"Why, what makes you think him mad?" asked Peter.

" Well, I'll tell yer. Mind you, don't go for to say nothing about it, that's all."

Peter promised, and Watkins then told his story.

" Well, he came home about ten o'clock last night, and I heard him a-tramping about, and after a bit he rings the bell, and I goes up to him. There he was, with his riding-whip in his hand, and his spurs on. I heard 'em click. 'Watkins,' says he, 'can you find my horse's stable?' says he. 'Yes,' says I. Thinks I, 'What's he going to do now?' 'I want to go for a ride; I don't feel ready for bed,' says he, 'so I should like a ride to tire me.' 'T'horse is all fastened up for the night,' says I, and I made this and that objection, and tried to soothe him like, and argue him out of it, but it weren't no good. Go he would, and go he must. So off we sets to the stables, and him and me saddles t'horse—not afore some of the people looked out of the windows, and I had to talk to 'em to make 'em certain we weren't reg'lar highway robberies. So off he rode. I sits up till half-past twelve a-waiting for him, then I thought it weren't no use waiting any longer; and, thinks I, he's gone after some jink."

" Some what?" asked Peter.

"Some spree like—something in the woman line, eh?"

"Oh, yes," said Peter, and listened most attentively to the rest of Watkins's story.

"So I went to bed," continued Watkins. "Well, whatever time he come in, I don't know. However, I went down this morning, about eight, and I sees his bedroom door open, and thinks I, 'Oh, he's never come in.' So in I goes and there he was, lying half on the bed, with one leg a-dangling on to the floor like, dressed just as I left him last night, and all dusty—his boots were just like a miller's. He were asleep when I came in, and I waked him, and he jumped up. 'Hullo!' says he, 'what's the time?' As I said, he didn't look as if he'd been drinking, but I thought his eyes looked rummy—wild like. He were quite in a good humour and didn't swear once. 'Watkins,' says he, 'just get my bath ready, will you?' says he, 'I'll get up.' Well, I went and got him his breakfast, and I devilled him a bit of chicken myself, and got a nice ham for him, and a homelet, 'cause I thought he must be hungry, d'ye see, after riding about all night. Well, and would yer believe it, when he rung me up for to take that 'ere letter—about ten it was—there was the chicken, and there were a slice of ham

on his plate, and I don't believe he'd eaten more'n what 'ud feed a sparrow? So I says, 'Something's wrong with him; I never knowed him miss his breakfast like that.' ”

“ He is overtired,” suggested Peter. “ Let him rest himself a little and he will perhaps eat afterwards.”

“ Well, that may be so,” replied Watkins, thoughtfully. “ I'll see how he goes on, but he looks queer to me, that's all.”

Saying this, Watkins shook hands mechanically with Peter, as a person possessed of a weighty secret.

“ I'll be seeing you again soon, Peter, and I'll let you know how he gets on.”

“ Do, please,” Peter said, and Watkins walked away.

But Peter did not keep his promise of secrecy, for he related as well as he could the whole conversation to Madame afterwards, when he took her dinner upstairs—just a wing of chicken, as the doctor had ordered.

“ I am afraid he has thoroughly tired himself out,” said Madame, at the end of Peter's story.

## CHAPTER X.

## IRREVOCABLE WORDS.

THE next day Jagellon walked over to Rose Lodge, and was duly marshalled by Peter into Madame's boudoir.

Peter, mindful of Watkins's singular suspicions, furtively examined the countenance of the visitor as he stood at the door, but failed to detect any signs of incipient lunacy. On the contrary, he thought the Count never looked better or handsomer, though he was not particularly well dressed. Peter noticed at a glance that one button of his coat was unfastened, and that his tie was rather on one side. Still the Count looked dangerously handsome as he entered the Countess's boudoir, with his brown head uncovered, the locks whereof were slightly disordered.

The Countess lay on the sofa with a leopard skin over her feet. She wore a white muslin dress with a black lace shawl or mantilla over her shoulders.

In a corner of the room sat her maid, a round-faced, blue-eyed little German, diligently sewing at a work-table. The day was hot and dull, and the window was open, whence a scent of jasmine pervaded the room. The Countess appeared to be still suffering from the effects of her strange adventure. The colour had returned, it is true, to her cheeks, but it was a colour of a more delicate hue than ordinary—a little flush on her cheek, which to the Count's eye rendered her more beautiful even than she was on the last occasion when he saw her.

Jagellon, without looking at the other occupant of the room, came straight to the Countess, and taking the hand she held up to him with a smile, said at once—

“Are you really better?”

“Oh, yes, I am nearly well now. Do I not look quite right again?”

She looked up at him smiling, but dropped her eyes again, for he was looking so earnestly at her, his eyes really seemed to be feeding on her face, and they had a wistful look in them that she could not meet.

“I think you are still a little delicate,” he said, “but at the same time I must say you do not look the worse for your illness.”

“That is well,” she answered. Then she

looked up at him coquettishly—"And now I must go through the form of thanking you."

"Do not say so," he interrupted her; "you have only granted a request I made to you that you would let me do you some slight service. If any thanks are to pass between us it is I who ought to thank you for doing what I asked."

"That is a light and airy way of looking at it," she replied laughing. "For my part, I am grateful to you for all you did for me, and I shall never forget your kindness." He was silent.

She looked down again at the leopard skin over her feet.

"And now," she said after a pause, "tell me all about it, for I can remember nothing. What is your idea of my adventure?"

Then Jagellon related how one night over a game of cards Lord Uttoxeter had shown him and Mr. Hudson a ring which he said Bagrathion had given to him, and which was capable of holding poison; how Uttoxeter had imparted to them his scheme of filling it with some drug in order, as Jagellon delicately put it, "to add piquancy to any adventure in which he might be engaged—and," he added, "I believe you have fallen a victim to some experiment of the old fool's."

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Peter, mindful of Watkins's singular suspicions, furtively examined the countenance of the visitor as he stood at the door, but failed to detect any signs of incipient lunacy. On the contrary, he thought the Count never looked better or handsomer, though he was not particularly well dressed. Peter noticed at a glance that one button of his coat was unfastened, and that his tie was rather on one side. Still the Count looked dangerously handsome as he entered the Countess's boudoir, with his brown head uncovered, the locks whereof were slightly disordered.

The Countess lay on the sofa with a leopard skin over her feet. She wore a white muslin dress with a black lace shawl or mantilla over her shoulders.

In a corner of the room sat her maid, a round-faced, blue-eyed little German, diligently sewing at a work-table. The day was hot and dull, and the window was open, whence a scent of jasmine pervaded the room. The Countess appeared to be still suffering from the effects of her strange adventure. The colour had returned, it is true, to her cheeks, but it was a colour of a more delicate hue than ordinary—a little flush on her cheek, which to the Count's eye rendered her more beautiful even than she was on the last occasion when he saw her.

Jagellon, without looking at the other occupant of the room, came straight to the Countess, and taking the hand she held up to him with a smile, said at once—

“Are you really better?”

“Oh, yes, I am nearly well now. Do I not look quite right again?”

She looked up at him smiling, but dropped her eyes again, for he was looking so earnestly at her, his eyes really seemed to be feeding on her face, and they had a wistful look in them that she could not meet.

“I think you are still a little delicate,” he said, “but at the same time I must say you do not look the worse for your illness.”

“That is well,” she answered. Then she

looked up at him coquettishly—"And now I must go through the form of thanking you."

"Do not say so," he interrupted her; "you have only granted a request I made to you that you would let me do you some slight service. If any thanks are to pass between us it is I who ought to thank you for doing what I asked."

"That is a light and airy way of looking at it," she replied laughing. "For my part, I am grateful to you for all you did for me, and I shall never forget your kindness." He was silent.

She looked down again at the leopard skin over her feet.

"And now," she said after a pause, "tell me all about it, for I can remember nothing. What is your idea of my adventure?"

Then Jagellon related how one night over a game of cards Lord Uttoxeter had shown him and Mr. Hudson a ring which he said Bagrathion had given to him, and which was capable of holding poison; how Uttoxeter had imparted to them his scheme of filling it with some drug in order, as Jagellon delicately put it, "to add piquancy to any adventure in which he might be engaged—and," he added, "I believe you have fallen a victim to some experiment of the old fool's."

"It is very possible," she said. "What a funny idea, though! Have you heard anything about it since?"

"Nothing," said Jagellon. "I was at the Club last night and saw Gus there, and one or two others, and no mention whatever was made of it. If anything had been said Gus would certainly have heard of it. That fellow hears every little gossip. You may depend upon it Uttoxeter will keep it snug, because he must have failed in his experiment, and nobody else has found it out."

"Well, I am glad of it," said Madame.

"However," continued Jagellon, "if you would like to have your revenge I think it would be easy to make Uttoxeter try the experiment again and make him fail, and then expose him to the ridicule of everybody."

"No," she answered decisively; "leave well alone. You will oblige me still further by never uttering a word on the subject."

"I will do as you please," he said gravely.

"And how did you get me home? I can remember nothing distinctly after you came into the room where General Bagrathion was vainly endeavouring to restore me to consciousness."

Jagellon in reply gave a short account of their journey in the cab, telling how he had

tried to keep her awake, how he had taken off her hat and wrung her hands and shaken her.

“And did you not put your hand on my head?” she asked.

“No,” he said.

“I have a vague idea of your doing something to my head, and, you will laugh at me, but I cannot help fancying that somebody kissed me—when or where I do not know.”

She was endeavouring to learn all that had happened. She remembered too well that her lips had been violated once,—had she twice suffered that wrong?

Jagellon looked down at the ground and was silent for a moment. Then he looked up with a smile—

“I was not guilty myself of such a thing,” he said—“at least not in deed; but I confess I was strongly tempted to do it.”

“While you were taking me in the cab?” she asked, looking quietly at him.

“Yes,” he said, looking on the ground.

“And what did you do? Come, you had better make a clean breast of it, and receive absolution; I know you did something a little too gallant.”

This was a “fib;” she had not in reality the slightest recollection of what had passed, but

she was full of curiosty to know how he had behaved to her.

Jagellon glanced at her maid across the room.

Catching the meaning of his glance, she said, “Oh, you can say what you please, Amalia only understands German and French.”

Then Jagellon spoke as follows, shyly at first, but more boldly as he proceeded with his story :—

“ Well, you know, when I had tried all I could to keep you conscious without effect, I let you lie back quietly in the cab, and by that time you were fast asleep. I sat watching you, and thinking what I could possibly do next. Well, as I looked at you, it struck me all of a sudden how very beautiful you looked then, if you will allow me to say so.”

“ Did I?” she answered. “ I should like to know how I looked, for future information.”

“ Well,” he said, looking dreamily at her while he recalled without difficulty the scene, “ you were fast asleep, and your face was perfectly calm, and you were rather pale, with only a little colour in your face, and your mouth was just closed—not compressed, you know, but your lips just touching—and I thought I might just take one kiss, without you knowing of it.”

“ Well, and so——?”

“Why, you see, I thought it would be hard lines on you. If you had been asleep merely, it might have been fair; but, being so helpless, it seemed to be rather treacherous, as it were. So I resisted the temptation, and I only put my arm round you, so that you could rest more comfortably.”

“Ah, you missed a good opportunity,” she said coquettishly, because she thought if he was only telling half the truth she might still tempt him to admit the rest. “You will not have such another, you may depend upon it.”

“Yes, I am half sorry I did not yield and tell you afterwards. Would you have been very angry?”

“No,” she said dubiously, still bent on getting at the truth, “I don’t think I should. I should have excused it in consideration of your general good conduct.”

He looked at her wistfully, and was silent. He was regretting now that he had missed so great a chance. She waited a little while, still in expectation of a further confession. Then, as he remained silent, she looked up at him and said softly, “Is that all?”

“Yes,” he answered simply, and then she believed him, and with that a revulsion of feeling came over her; she felt as though she had

wronged him because he was so faithful and true, and she had not believed him. She made a swift comparison between him and her other lover—"Hyperion to a Satyr!" And was she not to favour one more than the other? was she not an equally powerful friend or foe?

She turned to him, with the sweetest smile and the kindest look in her eyes, and she almost involuntarily moved her hand so as to offer it to him.

"You are the truest friend I have," she said.

Her sudden kindness was too strong for him; he seized her hand and instantly kissed it again and again—as if to avenge himself for his lost opportunity. She was taken by surprise at first, but recovering herself, she adroitly snatched her hand from his lips before they had half taken their fill of pleasure. He looked at her half-reproachfully half-timidly, and, after a few seconds' silence—"You know the truth," he said; "I can't help it, you are more than all the world to me."

"Count, you must not say that to me."

"Forgive me."

She bowed, a little haughtily. "You had better leave me now."

He rose and took her hand, which she held out to him.

“Good-bye,” he said. “Good day,” was her reply. He looked at her for a moment pleadingly, but there was no mercy in her haughty face, so he went slowly out of the room.

## CHAPTER XI.

## A BATCH OF LETTERS.

COUNT JAGELLON returned home from that visit to ponder over what he had said, and what she had said, and what was the result of their words. And meditating over these things, and looking back over the short time he had known the Countess, from the first time he had met her on that stormy night at the ball, to the lonely ride with her, and this last meeting when he had told her vaguely, but with sufficient distinctness to be understood, that he loved her better than anybody or anything in the world—thinking over these things, he resolved at last in the quiet of the night to write and confess everything to her, and so end it, and leave her for ever.

His letter ran as follows:—

“ I have said too much to you, and I sincerely ask your pardon for revealing what I should, had I been strong enough, have kept secret.

“ It seems to me, if I were to remain silent now, I should simply prove that I had made a frivolous attempt to gain you. Such an attempt would show that even if I really loved you I held your honour in light esteem. Believe me, that is not the case. Before all things I honour you above every one in this world. I hope I have always so treated you, and I cannot accuse myself of ever having fallen short of the honour due to a beautiful and perfect lady. I feel I forgot myself on the last occasion—I feel still more miserably that I may forget myself again.

“ Therefore, though it seems so hard on me, we must part. I must leave you, so that no breath of mine may sully the mirror of your honour.

“ I only ask of you two things. One is that you will not be too sorry for me or grieved for my hard fate. For I know by instinct partly, and also by what I have seen of you, that you have the tenderest heart that ever a woman had, that it would pain you to make the unworthiest mortal unhappy. Do not have any such thought. It would make me most miserable to think you were pained about myself.

“ Think of all the pleasure I have had in your society. Remember how kind you have always

been to me, how you have let me see you and talk to you as much as I pleased ; remember those conversations when you graciously and tenderly showed me where I was wrong in my life, and how I ought to be better. How can I ever thank you for this ?

“ And those pleasant rides with you in the Park, every one of which I can remember distinctly, and those meetings with you at the opera or in a drawing-room.

“ How happy you made me ! I did not know till then that one could be so utterly happy in this silly old world.

“ And what claim had I on your condescension ? Because I was your countryman ? A true countryman of yours, I am sure ! I think, if my father were to come to life, he would disown me. Not so you. You, having seen through my faults, have tried to discover if there were any good in me.

“ My dear Countess, I hope you have found something worthy in me, or rather you have yourself created it ; and it shall be the aim of my remaining life to show that your work is not quite unworthy of you. Let me ask this one thing, that you will give me a small share in the work you are engaged in. You are, I know, aiming at the freedom of your country.

“Is there any nobler aim? If there were, you would have discovered it, and would be engaged in it.

“Then let me try to follow afar off in your steps—apart from you; it must be so. I must work my way without your help, but still it will be some help to me to know I am doing some of your work—I may be still in my Countess’s service. Forgive me, you are not mine, and never can be mine, I know. It is not your fault.

“Is it not always so? One finds one’s idea of all beauty, of all that is heaven, only to find that it is impossible—it is beyond one’s reach.

“But for you, be happy always, set us an example to show that great natures are not always unhappy in the world.

“Let me hear of you sometimes, while I am working for you, as still admired by the best men, and wondered at by women. And perhaps you may think of me sometimes, as of one who loved you dearer than his own life—let me say this once and for all—and who lives and is ready to die for your sake. Ah! I fear fate will not be so kind—there is no sweeter death than dying for the woman you love. This is my best hope.

“And now good-bye. I know not quite

what I have written, and send it you as it is. Tell me what to do, and I will do it. You know best how I can honour you.

“Farewell, and do not quite forget me.

“JAGELLON.”

Having sealed this epistle, and having posted it himself the morning after writing it, Jagellon waited patiently that day, and impatiently the next, for an answer. On the third day he despatched Watkins to ascertain if Countess Woronzow was in town, and on his return with the intelligence that milady was at Rose Lodge, and quite well again, Jagellon’s hopes fell to zero.

It was evident that she was determined to have nothing to say to him on the score of his letter; her silence could only mean that if he could not conquer his passion he had better leave her; and, he thought, perhaps she was right; he must take the initiative and go. She could not feel with him; perhaps she was sorry for him, that was all; and what could she do for him?

So, having thought the matter over, Jagellon indited a second epistle—shorter, and perhaps more to the point.

“ MY DEAR MADAME,

“ I have waited till to-day in the hope of receiving a word from you. Your silence is a sufficient answer to my letter. I obey your silent wishes. I shall leave England as soon as I have arranged my affairs.

“ It only remains to say good-bye—good-bye to all I care for in the world.

“ Farewell! I shall remember you as long as I live.

“ JAGELLON.”

Madame Woronzow received this second letter on the fourth morning after the receipt of the first one.

Madame Woronzow was perhaps a somewhat lazy correspondent; she allowed letters to accumulate apparently; for, as she sat in her boudoir that morning, she had two or three letters before her, which evidently required answering.

There was one, for instance, from General Bagrathion, which she took from a secret drawer in her *escritoire*, where it had probably lain for a day or two.

This she prepared to answer first of all, reading it over again before writing her reply. It was as follows:—

“ I know I have sinned past all forgiveness. I was mad. I was suddenly tempted, and could not resist.

“ I scarcely know how I did it, or how it all happened. That is the worst of loving too much—a man is not master of himself.

“ Well, I played to win or lose all. I have lost, and I am not a man to deny my own defeat. Of course I have no longer any hope of gaining you.

“ I know a woman never forgets nor forgives such a fault.

“ For the rest, you need not fear me again.

“ I shall see you sometimes, perhaps, but we are really separated for always.

“ As to these plans of ours, I have no longer any interest in them ; I shall retire from the struggle if possible.

“ I have no longer any ambition ; I have no motive for continuing the fight for a liberty which is after all chimerical.

“ If you have any wishes as to our future relations, I shall be glad to conform to them if you will let me know what they are.

“ IVAN BAGRATHION.”

Having perused this letter, the Countess wrote the following reply :—

“ MY DEAR GENERAL,

“ You acknowledge, it seems, that you have committed a fault, an error of judgment, or, shall I say, a blunder? You intended, it appears, to commit a crime which, if successful, might have been useful to you.

“ As it is you blundered, and have lost everything that you had previously gained; that is, of course, supposing you considered my solemn promises a gain.

“ Those promises are nothing now; all is over, as you say, between us.

“ That being so, I refrain from reproaching you for your conduct; only, I ask you, have I deserved this treatment? have I ever, during the whole of the time I have known you, done anything to warrant such an attempt?

“ And you consider there is nothing more to do in the matter.

“ A good general, when defeated, employs all his talents to remedy the defeat.

“ A man of honour, when he has insulted a woman in a fit of passion, usually makes what reparation he can, and seeks if possible to merit her forgiveness. But you have peculiar ideas on the quantity of forgiveness that a woman is capable of.

“ Dear me! if we cannot forget even such

mean injuries as you have done me, if we were not to forgive the greater injuries which are done to us, what wholesale tragedies there would be in the world !

“ And you ask me to express my wishes. I would wish to see a man whom I have always considered rather above his fellows capable of a small amount of repentance.

“ Moreover, I will offer you my advice, which you may accept or not as you please. It is, that you change your tactics in life. Your present methods will only lead to fresh blunders, and end in bringing you to a ruin which will overwhelm all the great deeds which you have before done for the sake of the chimera, as you call it.

“ As to our future relations, that must of course depend on your conduct.

“ At present, you must not be surprised at my keeping on my guard against one who acts as my enemy.

“ Yours faithfully,

“ THEODORA WORONZOW.”

When she had signed and sealed up this little sermon, the Countess proceeded with a certain reluctance, as a little girl that devours the last choicest bit of a tart, to write her other letter.

First, however, she must needs read Jagellon's letter over again—the last letter, and then she took from her pocket the first one and dived into the middle of it, smiling as she read. Then she leant back in her chair and meditated for a few moments, while the smile still played round the corners of her mouth, and she turned over the letter in her hands, caressing it, as it were.

Then a sudden thought seemed to strike her ; she unlocked the secret drawer of her *escritoire* and brought out Bagrathion's letter—that one containing his proposal of marriage. This she read over calmly, and then (how idle she was this morning), went and read Jagellon's lengthy epistle over again. At last she did set to work to answer it.

She took up her pen, put her head first on one side, then on the other, looked doubtfully at the note-paper before her, and then dashed off, as women do when they write, these few lines :—

“ MY DEAR COUNT,

“ You cannot expect me to answer your letter all at once.

“ I really cannot decide what is best ; I must think about it.

“ But you must not write me any more such letters ; and if you cannot put a restraint on yourself, you must not see me.

“ For the rest, be patient, and do not do anything with Mr. Mentzel or any one else on any account, but leave it to me.

“ If you are sincere you will do what I ask you.

“ I am going out of town this evening, so I may not see you for some little time ; but you will hear from me.

“ Very sincerely yours,

“ THEODORA WORONZOW.”

This letter was not posted till the evening, so that Jagellon woke on the following morning to the delight of having a letter presented to him by his servant. He took about an hour reading the letter in bed, then he dressed hastily and came down to breakfast, which was a farce of a meal.

However, no sooner had he finished it than he rang for Watkins.

“ Watkins,” he said, “ just go over to Countess Woronzow’s, and get to know what her present address is ; she has gone out of town.”

On his return Watkins reported that milady

was at Brighton, but that Peter did not yet know what hotel or house she was staying at.

Whereupon Jagellon went down to Brighton by the afternoon express.

## CHAPTER XII.

## COMMON FINESSE.

IN vain Count Jagellon searched round Brighton for Madame Woronzow ; in vain he inquired at all the hotels he could find, and examined the fashionable Gazette of arrivals ; in vain he endured the monotony of the Parade, and the eternal waltzes and quadrilles, and worn-out operas, which the various bands, German and otherwise, did their best to play and failed.

After a fruitless search of five days, after having made himself an object of interest to those dusky-visaged young persons, the native ladies of Brighton, and after having endured the most ennuyeuse thing in the world, a Sunday in Brighton, Jagellon gave up the chase.

He said to Watkins, “I say, Watkins, that man Peter has bamboozled you.”

“That’s just what I’m beginning to think myself, my Lord,” replied Watkins, scratching his head ; “but,” he added, “I’ll be even with ‘un yet.”

“ Well, let’s quit this at once, then,” said his master, and off they set back to town.

Arrived in London, Watkins lost no time in going over to Rose Lodge, which had been left in the care of Peter.

“ Well, Peter,” he said, as soon as he was inside the house, “ so you’ve been playing a game on me.”

“ How ? ” asked Peter innocently.

“ Why, the Countess ain’t no more at Brighton than I am now.”

“ No ? ” said Peter; “ but I am forwarding letters to her there, that is all I know.”

“ Here,” he added, taking a letter out of his pocket, “ that is Madame’s address ; ” and he showed Watkins the direction, to the care of a Mrs. ——, at the address of a Terrace at Brighton.

Watkins looked puzzled at this.

“ Will you let me take the address ? ” he asked. Peter had no objection, and Watkins took down the address in a small betting-book he had, and went away.

“ But I don’t believe that’s where she is now, my Lord,” he said. “ I’ll find it out ; I’ll be even with ‘un yet.”

However, Jagellon judged it prudent to go down to Brighton, to make sure that Madame

Woronzow was not at the address given, and he told Watkins in the meantime to continue operations in London ; “ for,” said he, “ you will be more likely to blind them when they know I’m away, and I will telegraph to you from Brighton.”

So Watkins was left alone in London for a few days. He got a telegram on the first day after his master’s departure, saying that the Countess was not at the address, and he learnt afterwards, by letter, that the Count could not find out where she was, as the letters were addressed to a lady lodging there, who forwarded them herself. The Count said that he still hoped to get the address ; “ but,” he added in conclusion, “ do all you can in London to get it—never mind expense.”

Watkins felt that he had no easy task set him. It was all very well to talk of sparing no expense, but he knew it was useless to attempt bribery and corruption with the Countess’s servants.

He began his operations by keeping away from Rose Lodge altogether, in order to throw Peter off his guard ; but he diligently watched the house and a post-office and a pillar-box in the neighbourhood. For three days he discovered nothing, but on the fourth, in the after-

noon, he watched Peter out of the house to the neighbouring pillar-box, where he saw him post some letters.

As soon as Peter had gone away he went to the pillar and found that the box would be cleared in about half an hour.

“Good,” he said to himself, “I’ve just time to run round and get some more money. Postman may be a tough ‘un ; they’re so uncommon poor, them postmen, and want such a deal of money sometimes,” he soliloquized.

He returned in good time, before the opening of the box, and after waiting some minutes he descried the postman coming towards him, with his bag over his shoulder.

“Here,” said Watkins. “I want to see a letter there ; milady says she’s directed it wrong.”

“Who’s yer lady ?” said the postman, eyeing Watkins from head to foot.

“Countess Woronzow.”

“Well, and who are you ?”

“I’m her servant, of course.”

“Get out ! I know her servant well enough. He’s a foreign *bloke*.”

Watkins produced a couple of sovereigns. “Here, collar this,” he said, “and I’ll tell yer all about it. A gentleman wants to know where

Countess Woronzow's staying. She's out of town, yer see, and I can't get to know from them servants."

"No, I could have told *you* that," remarked the postman. "Mum's the word in that household."

"That's it," continued Watkins. "Well, I see'd one on 'em post some letters here, so, thinks I, perhaps you'd let me see 'em."

"You're a-going to take one, ain't yer?" said the postman, looking keenly at Watkins.

"No, I ain't."

"No fly?"

"I won't touch it, there now."

The postman looked at him dubiously, and then unlocked the box, and began to slowly rake the letters into the bag, with his hand, while Watkins stooped over him, watching each letter as it passed into the bag.

They both caught sight of the object of their search at the same moment.

"Is that your game?" asked the postman, holding up a letter addressed—

"A Madame

LA COMTESSE WORONZOW,

Ladywell,

Bucks."

“That’s it!” exclaimed Watkins. “I shall rec’llect it. Thank yer kindly.”

“You’re welcome,” replied the postman, pocketing his sovereigns.

And Watkins went off to the nearest telegraph station and contrived to spell out a message to Count Jagellon.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## JAGELLON VISITS THE CITY.

ON the day following Watkins's happy discovery, Jagellon, having returned home with all speed the previous night, drove down to the City to the offices of Rosencranz and Co., Cherubim Court.

As soon as he had learnt the address from his servant, and had sufficiently exclaimed against his own stupidity in not having before guessed where the Countess Woronzow was to be found, he set about thinking over the means of joining her at Ladywell.

For, unfortunately, he had received no invitation from Baron Rosencranz to come to his Alban Villa, owing probably to his having seen but little of the great Baron during the last month or so. He had, therefore, to fish for an invitation, and an immediate one—a proceeding which he undertook sans scruple, as Rosencranz generally asked him to his country house, and

Jagellon knew such men liked to have their houses well filled on occasions.

Therefore, on this afternoon, the Count's neat little cab made its way along the comparatively silent street called Cheapside, guided amongst the throng of plebeian vehicles by Watkins, who regarded the policemen regulating the crossing stream of vehicles, and the impudent omnibus drivers and cabmen, with haughty disdain.

The cab has to stop at the entrance of the narrow street out of which Cherubim Court turns, for the street is already blocked up with broughams, and hansom cabs, and costermongers' barrows.

It is the hour of the day when trade is at its busiest, when the gambling in money and stocks is at its hottest.

There is, indeed, a hurrying to and fro. "Fat and greasy citizens" waddle along, some hatless, some flourishing a paper, which to them may be of priceless value; spruce young clerks, frock-coated, dart hither and thither across the street, like flies across a sunbeam.

It is well worth remarking by those who see this—and who has not? the epitome of our civilization, the point to which all things tend—the making of money. All nations are gathered here; nay, were a stranger to be conveyed here

secretly by some fairy, it would be difficult for him to tell in what country he was deposited. Here the fat and moustachioed Frenchman, the spectacled German, the smooth Italian, and the livid-cheeked and yellow-eyed Greek mix with the natives, each chattering, sometimes in his own language, sometimes in a tongue foreign to him.

These are the men who do the work of the world ; their doings are daily chronicled in the newspapers of the land, and spirited across earth and sea to all nations, day by day, and hour by hour.

They are a curious race, these business men, reminding one of the gnomes that the old German stories tell of, who used to work underground, unceasingly fashioning the minerals of the earth.

Many of their faces are, even at this period of the afternoon, already hot and flushed with wine, which they have to drink to keep their audacity going. There is no beauty to be seen amongst them ; theirs are not handsome faces ; they are all either bloated and pimpled with drink, or sallow, or with prominent cheekbones, and with a look of wolfish hunger for gain in their hollow eyes. They soon age ; you can see what they are coming to in the aspect of that tall man there,

like a walking corpse, with white face and hollow cheeks and stooping figure, and white beard stained with cigars and red wines ; or in that palsied creature, painfully slipping his feet, in slippers, along the ground ; one of his eyes is drawn down and discoloured, one ear is half eaten away by disease, the other stuffed with cotton wool, and he wears a brown wig to conceal his scabby head, making him look younger than perhaps he is, and more hideous than he would be without that adjunct. Such are the elders of this strange race, and to this will all the younger ones come if they remain at this dissipated labour, and if they do not foolishly ruin themselves, as many do, and drift into a filthy old age, lived in low public-houses, amidst petty schemes and silly swindles.

Count Jagellon, with his healthy brown complexion, upright figure, and easy gait, appeared to belong to quite another race of beings. Some of the denizens of the place turned to look at him, some questioned amongst themselves who he was. No one knew him. They seemed to stand rather in awe of him ; for, though they jostled against one another in their hurry, they never ran against him ; possibly they instinctively feared lest he might send them flying into the middle of the street,

with a turn of his elbow. So Jagellon walked slowly on, found Cherubim Court under an archway, and entered Rosencranz and Cos'. offices through great swing-doors of veneered mahogany, with the name “Rosencranz & Co.” on bright brass plates.

He had to wait some time in an outer office till his turn came, while he watched and was watched by the clerks, some sitting at their desks working and whispering, some running in and out of swing-doors in the office, in obedience to the summons of invisible bells.

And people were continually coming in on some business or other, and spoke, or wrote, or delivered some message and went out again.

At length the great man was disengaged, and Jagellon was ushered through the swing-doors into a small room, and thence into the Baron's sanctorum, with its Turkey carpet and soft chairs and curiously constructed desk of mahogany, at which little Rosencranz was seated with a huge quill pen in his hand.

“Ah! my dear Count, how are you? What can I do for you?”

“Oh, nothing particular. I want to invest in a few Russians; they are good things I hear, and I should like to recoup some of my losses at Goodwood.”

“Well,” said Rosencranz, smiling dubiously, “I think you might invest in safer things, my dear Count, but do as you like.”

“Well, just tell me which of your men I am to go to, and I will settle the thing.”

Rosencranz rang a handbell, a small clerk appeared, and the Baron of course recommending his client to invest in the particular bonds most likely to go down in value, Jagellon’s little stroke of business was soon settled.

Having thus swindled, as he calculated, Jagellon out of a hundred pounds or so, Rosencranz shook hands with him in high good humour, his face beaming with smiles.

“Good day, my dear Count, good day. When shall we see you at Ladywell?”

“When you ask me,” replied Jagellon, laughing.

“Did we not ask you? I did not know, but you might have come without asking. Well, look here,” proceeded Rosencranz in a sudden gush of good humour, and thinking he might possibly get something more out of his Countship,—“Look here, I am going back this evening, will you come with me? We can put you up somewhere.”

Jagellon seemed to hesitate. “Well, I don’t

know. I have nothing particular to do. What time are you going?"

"By the 6.30."

"All right, I will join you at Paddington."

"Very good. *Au revoir*, then."

"*Au revoir*." Exit Jagellon, and Rosencranz returned to his big quill pen.

Outside the office Jagellon twirled his moustache with a smile of content, and he walked down the street carelessly, the people making way for him, all except one fat man with streaming face, who, rushing round a corner, was unable to stop himself, and came full tilt against Jagellon. Jagellon gently put him aside, and the fat man spurted on without saying a word, such was his hurry.

Jagellon drove to his banker's and then home.

On his arrival there he ordered Watkins to pack up at once and make ready to start.

"I am off to Ladywell by the 6.30 train," he said quietly.

"Yes, milord," was all Watkins's reply, though he secretly winked one eye at the wall.

So rapid were the packing operations of Mr. Watkins, that all the Count's and his own things were packed up soon after five o'clock; and then Watkins, considering that he had

some time to spare, went over to Rose Lodge to say good-bye to Peter. The conversation between them was short and to the point.

“I just come to say good-bye to yer, Peter,” says Watkins.

“Where are you going?”

“To Ladywell,” with a leer of the left eye.

“Ah!”

“I tuk the liberty of reading the address of one of your letters,” remarked Watkins. “In the pillar-box,” he added.

Peter smiled. “Well,” he said, “you acted according to your orders, and I according to mine.”

“That’s it. So we’re quits.”

“Well,” said Peter, “I will do you one good turn. Let me advise you to mind what you are about.”

“Much obliged to you, Peter—much obliged to you. I take your advice in a friendly spirit. When you want the half of a fi-pun note (flourishing one of those articles before Peter), you come to me, that’s all. Good-bye, Peter.”

“Good-bye.”

They shook hands, and Watkins returned to his master.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## LADYWELL.

WHEN one looks at some old house built in the days of feudal law, or on the ruins of a great abbey or sturdy castle, or when one reads of peoples who lived long ages ago, and whose traces have all but disappeared, one cannot help wishing that all things did not come to an end, that there was no decay in the world, and one had not to think of "the days that are no more."

It is all so unfair on us poor transitory beings that all we do, and even ourselves, should be destroyed inevitably. Whether we have done good, or whether we have been evil and worthless, it is all the same in the end—we die, and are forgotten. Of course there are one or two men who are so wonderfully gifted by nature that the memories of their lives endure, but they are an infinitesimal part of the human race; they come one at a time—about once in a thousand years. We need not count them.

As for the rest of us, we live through our youth unconscious of our doom, and when we have passed through our youthful delusions, all we can do is to slowly count the years that bring us to old age, when death will slowly and steadily master us, or will surprise us with a sudden attack ; and it is in vain that we struggle, we fall inevitably to the ground. And no one cares for us any more, and no one will love us again. Some may remember us for a month—perhaps a year, then our names will be forgotten, and at last the sea of oblivion will close over us, and we shall be utterly lost for ever.

Perhaps it is best so. If we were to live as long as the grey ruins of some old mansion, how sick we should grow of everything ! how sad, on looking at the perpetual farce of human life ! So Ladywell looks—some part of it at least does. The greater part of it has been freshly carved, and scraped, and painted, and varnished, and veneered, till it looks a perfectly brand new house on the whole. Still, there are one or two old chimneys which, being in the background of the house, have been neglected, and still stand up in their old grey stone to give their testimony against this new generation ; and there are one or two bits at the back of the

house, and one or two outbuildings, which in the hurry of modern improvement (save the mark !) have never been touched, and there they stand as they were built hundreds and hundreds of years ago.

If only these bricks and stones had voices what stories they could tell ! how they would put to shame our historians and wise archæologists ! What strange changes these old buildings have seen since the time when they formed part of a great abbey that owned the surrounding lands ! The beginning of all the life of this particular spot was merely a well or spring of clear water—a very common thing, one would think, near the Thames ; but then this well was blessed by our Lady, so that the water thereof healed the faithful of divers diseases. Hence arose a little village, a tabard for the weary pilgrim ; and then, when the Conqueror bequeathed the surrounding country to one of his doughty knights, the pious warrior gave a portion of his property to the Church, and built a monastery dedicated to St. Mary of Wycherley, and so this monastery grew till it could lodge a hundred pilgrims ; and then a great church was built over the famous well—built of stone instead of the brick of the original house ; and the monastery, though only a branch or “cell” of another

great abbey, acquired all the surrounding lands ; its fiefs were knights whom it kept in order, and its servants were the stout yeomen of England. A grand empire was the empire of the Church in those days, when kings and barons bowed to its decisions. Now it has all passed away, the empire is destroyed, its power forgotten, and, as a type of the whole, there remain only an arch or two of this abbey-church, under which black-robed monks sang sonorous canticles, and processions of choristers, beautiful in white and scarlet, moved up the nave while they lifted up their young voices in praise of our Lady of Wycherley. But the glories of the monastery faded away, and at last the ruthless conqueror of the Church cast out the last solitary monk from his abode, and gave the house and lands to one of his courtiers who had skilfully adapted his policy to the times.

Instead of the black and hooded monks engaged in perpetual prayer, or study, or meditation, Ladywell, as it was called, was filled with ladies in satin and lace, and gallants in silk and hose, who danced and played in the monastic halls, and dreamed of love in the cells of the old monks. The change was not altogether for the worse. The church crumbled to ruins, but its sacred stones were used to rebuild the house

in greater splendour ; its towers looked over the elm-trees, and surveyed the busy rooks in their nests ; its tall square windows looked across the flowing river ; lackeys and pages lounged about the hall,—tiny pages, who looked their smallest in the height of the hall, and were all but invisible at the top of the great broad stairs.

The days of religion were over, but still there was beauty, and elegance, and gallantry—no bad substitutes after all. Ah ! and they used to love a little in those days. Those young gallants, in their lace and ruffles “all rustling,” with their finely formed legs cased in silken hose, who used to walk through the minuets marvels of elegance and bravery—these men were always ready to throw away their fortune for the sake of a beautiful woman or the prince they served ; and many a duel has been fought under the shadow of the woods, across the park there, when two lives were risked, and perhaps lost, for a fair woman. Perfect folly, of course ; still the women in those days were worth some risk. They, for their part, loved without reserve ; they threw everything away for the sake of a man they liked—wealth, position, honour, everything. And then their beauty ! just look at their portraits, their miniatures ; I say it was worth while risking one’s little life to be

loved so passionately by such beautiful creatures. Now—why, now-a-days, the worst of it all is that a man cannot help feeling a fool, even to himself, to risk a few pounds, shillings and pence on the quasi-beauties who languidly smile on him if he has money in his purse, and reject him mercilessly if he has none ; taking precious good care in any case that they do not inadvertently fall in love themselves. So love is out of fashion, and beauty and elegance have had their day in Ladywell, and religion is gone before, and now almighty gold reigns supreme ; for Baron Rosencranz, the German Jew, owns the ancient abbey and old manor-house of Ladywell. So, bidding a long farewell to the pleasant past, we must make the best of the present. After all it is not so very bad. Gold can do a good many things ; it cannot make a beautiful woman, nor a plain woman beautiful, but it can provide a number of luxuries, and luxury is rather nice. Just at this time, that is to say during the month of September, when the Ladywell season is at its height, the old house wore a decidedly gay air. On the lawn before the front door tennis was played, Sunday and week-days and all, by ladies in brilliant costumes, curiously cut, and men in white flannel ; out of the stables a four-in-hand slowly moved, or a

light dog-cart was driven off, or a neat victoria, to a dog-show, or a sale of hunters, or some neighbouring races, or a cricket match. And in the mornings a group of men in leggings, with guns on shoulders, would issue from the hall-door, light their pipes or cigars by the gate leading to the lawn amidst a sparkle of fusees, and saunter off to the coverts, followed by two or three dogs at their heels, to return in the evening dusty, or muddy, or wet from the dewy bracken, but laden with the spoils of their sport. Inside the house itself was every luxury for the thirty or forty guests staying there ; for one could idle about in the drawing-room, or private rooms, or smoking-room, or library, or billiard-room, and talk, read, or look idly out of the windows across the lawn, or over the river to the island opposite and listen to the distant lasher.

The house has two fronts, so to speak, the real front, where the hall-door is, which looks over the lawn and the circular drive towards the stables and park ; and also the river front, looking over a garden, laid out with artistic flower-beds, and sloping down to the river, or rather a cut running to the lasher, below the house and grounds. The island thus formed is thickly planted with trees, principally willows, birches, and laburnums, and secludes the house from a

too near observation of the numerous boats and steamers that pass up and down the main course of the river. Opposite the island is a new boat-house, in which is docked a pretty steam launch.

On this side of the house, on the first floor, is the drawing-room proper, an irregularly-shaped room, with recesses formed by the outer wall of the house. The colour of this room is a delicate pink ; the walls are painted pink ; the satin covering of the causeuses, settees, ottomans and chairs is of the same colour ; the woodwork of the chairs being gilt, picked out with pink and white paint. The only contrast is afforded by the carpet, which is of a silvery grey moss pattern, and by the numerous water-colours on the walls, a number of which represent Eastern scenes with their gorgeous colours. There are besides one or two cabinets, one especially, of ormolu, filled entirely with wedgwood ware ; also one or two tripods for flowers, and a fine marqueterie table, on which is a large album containing photographs, the covering of which is of mother-of-pearl. You enter this room from the first right-hand landing on the hall stairs, and on your left as you enter is another door leading to the other drawing-room, or ball-room as it is called—a room shaped like an E, with great tall windows, whence there is a view over

the park, to the blue hills beyond. This is the finest room in the house, extending nearly the whole length of the house at the back ; its walls covered with products of exhibitions at the Royal Academy and paintings by modern continental artists ; its oaken floor almost reflecting your figure as you walk over it, and its lengthy open space unoccupied by furniture, so that it looks unfurnished till it is filled with many-hued figures of whirling waltzers or intricately revolving chains of the Lancers.

These are the principal rooms of the house, though we should include the long dining-room on the left of the hall-door as you enter the house, with its broad shallow bay window, divided by heavy mullions, and its long mahogany table and gigantic sideboard of the same wood. There were other cosy rooms which I have already mentioned, in some one of which you could find quiet in the midst of the bustle, to think and dream, or to talk *tête-à-tête* and flirt.

The general condition of the house was one of bustle and activity ; it was always full, guests succeeded one another, the house swarmed with servants in livery standing about, and ever and anon a lady's maid tripped up and down the broad stairs. The hurry and rush of the City seemed to have been imported into the country

house ; but there was no rest, peace, or solitude, as in the evening hours of the City of London —nay, it was just in the evening, at the dinner hour, that the bustle and hurry culminated. There was the perpetual “tirring” of the electrical bells ; men-servants ran up and down stairs on the service of their masters, and trim female domestics flew upstairs in response to the impatient calls of a lady’s dressing-room. In the hall men and women were constantly arriving, a carriage returning late from a drive, a shooting party, or some guests from the neighbouring houses invited to dinner. And these divers arrivals stood talking and laughing, and grumbling in the hall, the ladies calling for their maids or for some particular friend ; while the men, hungry and tired, muttered a swear or two and hallooed for their servants, for many of them had their own valets at Ladywell, who were stowed away somewhere in the house. So the hall was filled with loud-voiced men and women, who, regardless of the risk of being late for the soup, loitered about chattering.

“Where have you been ?” says one man, turning from contemplating his bag, well-filled with partridges.

“Oh, we have been calling on So-and-so. Such a bore !”

“Have you had good sport? Oh, what pretty birds!”

“Ah! poor sport—birds awfully slow.”

“Well, did you find any good horses?”

“Nothing worth hunting—one or two good carriage things.”

“You might have bought me one. I want one for my new carriage.”

“Do you? You didn’t tell me.”

“Well, remember next time,” and the lady turns up the stairs, her pretty boots peeping out as she puts first one, then the other carefully on each stair, while she hums an air from “Norma,” apparently not thinking of what she is doing.

At length the clock in what used to be one of the towers, now cut down to inferior dimensions, strikes the hour with a slow ting-tong, and very soon the gong sounds, and then they come slowly down the stairs—Lord Thryburgh and Baroness Rosencranz leading the way; and there is my Lord Uttoxeter with Countess Woronzow, and with low-murmured talking the pairs of black figures and variegated dresses pass down-stairs through the hall into the dining-room, with a pleasant sound of the swishing of dresses and a rustle of silk and lace. The dining-room door is closed, and a hush falls on the rest of the house. Now and then the door is opened

by a late arrival, or a servant coming out for something, and you can hear the loud and confused sound of voices and clatter of knife and fork in the room ; the door is shut and all is still again.

But the house cannot be long quiet ; there is presently a sound of wheels outside on the gravel drive, the hall-door is swiftly thrown open by a servant, waiting in expectation, and enter the owner of the mansion, the lord of the busy household, little fat Rosencranz in person, just arrived from London, and Count Jagellon by his side.

“Are we late, Thomas ? ” asks the Baron.

“Dinner has been served about a quarter of an hour, my Lord ” (all his servants called the little man “my Lord ! ”).

Jagellon’s baggage was quickly brought in by Watkins and handed to the attendant servants, half a dozen of whom were there ready to wait on their master.

The Baron gave his orders ; the little man evidently liked to feel that he commanded everything here, that the magnificent villa and the picturesque scenery, and the park and woods and coverts were all his very own ; so he issued his commands, and he and Jagellon were conducted upstairs to their rooms.

Now Monsieur le Baron dressed in haste, being anxious to join his guests, and he was therefore at the dinner-table some time before Jagellon made his appearance.

Two or three courses had been already accomplished, the numerous servants, one to each guest, in their blue and gold laced livery were already busy pouring out the different wines, according to the taste of the guest each served, and conversation was beginning to flow more easily with the wine.

Several of the guests greeted their host on his entering the room; pretty ladies smiled to him, and gentlemen gave him polite words.

“ You are late, Baron ; ” “ We began too soon ; ” “ Can I make room for you ? ” were some of the *banalités* addressed to him; for every one honoured him, and felt grateful to him just then at the sumptuous banquet. And the little man smirked and bowed, and waved his hand in acknowledgment of the attention he received, and sat him down to gobble up his soup and a morsel of fish, which were swiftly provided for him by his head butler.

His wife sat at the head of the table placid, and calmly surveying the length of table glittering with gold plate.

A warm scent of wine and flowers pervaded

the room, mixed with the delicate steams of the different viands—a voluptuous and luxurious atmosphere—and every one was busy eating, and talking now and then between the mouthfuls and courses. Perhaps the conversation was not particularly brilliant, possibly it was generally stupid, but then it was so much pleasanter to eat and drink the good things at the table than to exert one's self by talking.

So, while every one was busy with the pleasures of the table, the door opened and Jagellon walked in, dressed with careful negligence, his brown head looking handsome enough in contrast to the plain evening dress he wore.

His entry took all the guests by surprise, for Rosencranz had been in too great a hurry about eating his dinner to announce his fresh guest.

Lord Uttoxeter, who first saw him, raised his eyes in languid surprise, and the hostess turned in placid astonishment to shake hands with him.

Countess Woronzow, who sat with her back to the door, gave a little start, scarcely perceptible, when she saw him, and then nodded to him as he made her a little bow with a rapid glance of his eyes, which were instantly averted as he shook hands with Lord Thryburgh, who called

out in rather a loud voice, "Hullo! Jagellon, you here?" and thus announced him to the rest of the busy company.

A movement of surprise passed over the party as Jagellon walked down the room to his place, the lowest place at the table. Pretty Mrs. Guinness Price gave a perceptible start, accompanied by a little "Oh!" when she saw him. General Bagrathion, who sat by her, waved his knife like a little sword as a gesture of recognition, and as the Count proceeded to his place with his usual nonchalant walk a running accompaniment of remarks followed him.

"Where the deuce have you sprung from?" said Mr. Hudson, twisting round his head to look at his old comrade.

"I say, my dear fellow, we have just done," remarked Gus Fipps from the other side. "Have a peach?"

"All right, I don't mind dining by myself," said Jagellon, coolly, as he sat down and began sipping his soup.

An entrée followed and quickly disappeared, some oysters followed suit, then Jagellon swallowed two or three glasses of Rheinwein, and began to talk.

I said that conversation did not progress very fast at the table before, but perhaps the guests

had now eaten nearly enough, perhaps the wine enlivened their intellects ; whatever the reason, the talking now became fast and furious.

Count Jagellon having arrived fresh from town, could impart the immediate gossip and scandal of the place, of which the others had only heard partially through the newspapers. One of the principal scandals, which had but just come off, was that of a popular but unfortunate minister of the Word, who had got into an imbroglio with his wife. The details and inventions of young barristers, Jagellon, having attended at the Court for one day, *faute de mieux*, was able to give, together with descriptions of plaintiff and respondent, and this with words and sentences every one of which had a double meaning, the secret meaning being easily understood by every one, so that ladies were fain to put their handkerchiefs to their pretty mouths, and the men chuckled and laughed in their glee at the misfortunes of a poor husband. Those who were higher up the table inquired the cause of all the laughter, not having heard Jagellon's words, until the subject of conversation reached Uttoxeter, who loudly exclaimed—

“ Ah ! yes, ——'s divorce, very interesting case indeed.”

So spake my Lord, but nobody gave him

any rejoinder, though Rosencranz deferentially listened to him, and Madame de Woronzow looked at him vacantly.

Meanwhile, Jagellon carried on the conversation in the same flippant and cynical vein. He seemed to be expressing his contempt for the world and every one in it. There was a cool air of superiority about him that one or two of his friends—Gus, for instance—noticed, without being able to assign any cause for the difference in his manner.

But now the ladies rose, like a flock of many-hued wild-fowl on the margin of some mere, and moved slowly out of the room. Jagellon ceased talking and turned to look for the departure of one lady, whose beautiful black head towered above her companions.

Countess Woronzow went slowly out of the room with her head a little bent, and there was an indescribable air of gentleness in her movement as she went out.

When the dining-room door was closed by the host, the conversation ran wilder than before.

“Very interesting case that you were telling us about,” began Lord Uttoxeter, bending over the table towards Jagellon. “Of course it is like most divorce cases, mutual *sins*.” Lord Uttoxeter generally used technical words rather

than a circumlocutive method of expressing facts.

“I don’t know that,” replied Jagellon. “There are plenty of men ready to bet that there was nothing of the sort. That is the most curious feature of the whole story, the sweet innocence of all concerned.”

“Paul and Virginia style of thing?” inquired Hudson.

“No, not exactly that,” proceeded Jagellon. “Supposing two or three Adams and Eves transplanted from the garden of Paradise——”

“To Kensington Gardens,” interrupted some one.

“Exactly, before that affair of the serpent, and those horticultural pursuits.”

“They wore clothing, did they not?” inquired Lord Thryburgh.

“When they went amongst other people they did, of course, but living isolated amongst themselves they do not seem to have worn very much. You hear a good deal about dressing-gowns and night-gowns.”

“A very nice fashion, I think, and a convenient one,” remarked Hudson.

“Then imagine,” proceeded the Count, “people living in this primeval state, ignorant, perhaps, of any particular sin and wickedness,

and you will believe that it is possible there was no real cause for divorce. At least this is a plausible view of the case. For instance, a husband, in his absence, leaves his wife alone in the charge of one of his friends, and apparently no harm comes of the arrangement."

"Was she good-looking?" asked Gus.

"Yes, I believe she was. Then you have a lady consulting a gentleman friend on medical questions about herself."

"Medical questions!" exclaimed several voices.

"Yes, why not? Each said what he or she thought to his or her friend, then why not consult one another about their bodies as well as their souls?" asked Jagellon, looking round the table with cynical gravity.

"Precisely," said Lord Uttoxeter. "What could be more simple and touching, more delicious to both parties? What annoys me so much is the chances those religious fellows have. When do we laymen meet with such piquant situations, such novelties in the art of love? Fancy the ecstasy, the thrill it would give one," proceeded my Lord, unctuously, "when one said to a sweet young woman, 'I love you,' and she replied, 'Do you? I wish, then, you would tell me what is a good thing for indigestion.'"

Here Uttoxeter was rewarded and interrupted by general laughter from every part of the table.

He smiled gently. "Seriously," he said, "I have often thought of becoming one of those preaching men; several men do it, you know,—Lord ——, for instance."

"Do, Uttoxeter," said Jagellon, "you would have *un succès fou*."

"Fancy how the women would run to hear you!" remarked Hudson.

"I think they would," replied my Lord with a modest air. "My really pet idea is to become a Roman Catholic priest."

"A priest? Ah, you would have to mind your eye, then," said Lord Thryburgh.

"No, I think not. What I want to do is to belong to one of those collections of priests all living together, not exactly monks—you know what I mean. You can go to dinner-parties and balls, and all that sort of thing, so that you can make plenty of acquaintances. And then the beauty of the arrangement is this. In your priests' house you have several reception rooms for the convenience of your friends, or for anxious penitents, who do not like to wait in church. What could possibly be more easy and comfortable? Picture to yourself the charm-

ing réunions you could have in the stillness and seclusion of a semi-monastic abode—with no one to interrupt you, no one to suspect you. I think I should soon make converts ; and then everything would be so new, everything would appear to you under a new aspect."

"I don't know about that," said Hudson. "I think it would be rather slow."

"It's slow enough, living in the world," remarked Lord Thryburgh.

"And expensive," put in Jagellon, with a glance at Lord Uttoxeter, which several of the party caught and smiled at. "You would save money by it, Uttoxeter," he added.

"I don't know," said Lord Uttoxeter ; "perhaps I might."

"Oh, bother love and religion !" ejaculated Hudson. "I don't believe either of them can match a bottle of this wine," holding up his glass of Lafitte and then draining it.

A silent assent appeared to be given to this proposition.

"You might add a good cigar," said Jagellon. And then the host proposed that they should adjourn to the smoking-room.

There, when every one had chosen a cigar or cigarette to his taste out of a large cabinet filled with some thousands of those luxuries, of every

sort and size, the conversation returned to its ordinary dead level.

The men paired off, as it were ; Rosencranz and Bagrathion talked about business, Jagellon and Hudson talked about racing and sport over their cigars and liqueurs, and Gus and some others discussed politics.

But I think it is time to describe more in detail the guests who were gathered together at Ladywell, and I find I have before me a tediously long chapter, so, as I have still a great deal to relate about Ladywell, I must divide it into shorter chapters, and we will start a fresh one at once.

## CHAPTER XV.

LADYWELL (*continued*).—THE INHABITANTS  
THEREOF.

GENERAL BAGRATHION's situation at Ladywell was, it must be confessed, rather a difficult one. On the one hand, his only chance of success in his matrimonial schemes was to be exceedingly circumspect and quiet in his demeanour ; but then the fear was that if he kept himself in the background he might be altogether forgotten. And, on the other hand, he instinctively felt that he could not actively promote his suit, as any reference to the subject might, after what had occurred between himself and Madame de Woronzow, be considered in the light of an insult. So that he could neither defend himself nor bring himself into favour except by his general good behaviour, which is a very slow method of progression in the affairs of love.

However, he had managed to put himself on a good footing with the Countess on her arrival at Ladywell, for Bagrathion had been there

about a week when she arrived. He contrived to obtain a few minutes' quiet conversation with her the next morning, during which he assumed the pose of a penitent.

The Countess was not so cold in manner as he expected she would be ; she was quietly grave, that was all.

He frankly confessed his fault—"his mad blunder," as he called it—and he hoped to be able to undo the bad opinion he had given her of himself.

"I know it will take time," he said, "but I shall try and win your favour again ; and will you try and forgive me, Madame ? "

"I *have* forgiven you," she answered. "I bear you no ill-will, and I hope to be able to think as highly of you as I did before. Be as you were before, General, when you gained all your renown."

Of course he vowed that he would do his utmost, and he declared he would work hard for their common cause ; and he added that he was staying at Ladywell for that purpose, to watch financial affairs with Rosencranz.

"Very good," she said, "and if you want my assistance you will let me know."

He embraced her offer gladly, and took advantage of it to talk to her and tell her something

about finance and politics nearly every day. Thus they were almost on their old footing, though she always maintained a grave reserve with him, and avoided being alone with him ; there was still a cloud between them, but things went on smoothly, and that was all the General could hope for.

But Jagellon's entry into the society of Lady-well changed everything.

The fact is, that Bagrathion's suspicions had been aroused by the termination of the unlucky incident at the Equality Club. It was strange, he thought, that the Countess had so readily confided herself to the care of a comparative stranger, as Jagellon appeared to be, if there was nothing between them. But he was rather puzzled by the Count's future conduct. He contrived to set a watch on his movements, and when he found that Jagellon only called once on Madame de Woronzow, and that when she left London he did not apparently follow her, but went to Brighton and did not come to Lady-well with the Countess, he decided that after all her going home under his care was only an impulse of the moment ; she could not choose any other course, and it rather argued that Jagellon was not her lover. Bagrathion also found out that Mr. Mentzel had received in-

structions not to elect Jagellon into the Secret Society.

But now Jagellon had come unexpectedly on the scene, and Bagrathion's dormant suspicions awoke again. Was it possible that he had a rival? Had he been duped all along by the clever Countess? And was it possible, too, that Jagellon was deeper than he looked? The General had had a vague idea, from what he thought to himself and heard of from others, that Jagellon had been making play with Miss Golding, the heiress; but she was away, and, besides, Gus was seemingly on quite friendly terms with the Count.

Thinking over the matter, Bagrathion determined to watch his supposed rival closely. Moreover, in order to prepare for any scheme of revenge, he determined to play a different game with Rosencranz. For, before, he had been strenuously urging the banker, in the interests of the revolutionary party, to lower the price of Russian stocks, and if possible to create a panic, declaring that he saw no prospect of a settlement of affairs, and hinting at rumours of a wide-spread conspiracy in Poland. A day or two after Jagellon's arrival, however, he had a secret consultation with Baron Rosencranz, when he advised him to hold back and proceed carefully.

“I don’t know yet what may happen,” he said, “affairs are so complicated.”

And the banker promised to follow his advice, for he had already found it rather profitable to do so, and had no hesitation in continuing to follow his lead.

Thus the General, like the European Powers now-a-days, preserved an attitude of armed vigilance.

But he could not discover anything to operate upon ; the more he watched the more puzzled he became, and he could only vacillate between two opinions, which he adopted alternately on alternate days, viz. :—either that Jagellon was the deepest plotter he had ever encountered, or that his own suspicions were groundless.

It is only due to Jagellon to state that his manner towards the Countess was perfect. Thinking within himself that he had committed a fault, he made every effort to prevent himself repeating it. On the very first evening he spoke to the Countess in the drawing-room words which any one might hear and any one understand. The effort was a hard one, perhaps, but he effectually schooled himself to speak calmly to her, and to behave in her presence as if they were merely common acquaintances.

He hoped she was quite well ? how did she

amuse herself, and had she had any rides about the country ?

Yes, she had been twice on horseback, and enjoyed it very much, the country was so pleasant.

“ Is this your first visit here ? ” inquired Jagellon.

“ Yes, I have never been here before.”

“ Ah, then I think you will find it very enjoyable. This is certainly one of the prettiest spots on the river. I suppose you have been on the river ? ”

No, she had not ; she had done very little as yet except resting after the fatigues of London. Bagrathion heard every word of this little conversation.

Then Gus and Baron Rosencranz and some others joined in the conversation, and soon afterwards Jagellon left the group and joined Mrs. Price. Now Mrs. Guiness Price soon became Bagrathion’s main puzzle. She was constantly with Jagellon, and before a week had passed her almost exclusive attention to him caused scandal to associate her name with the Count’s.

It was admitted by every one that the love was all on her side. Jagellon appeared to be indifferent about the matter, and simply followed his good fortune, as people said.

No doubt Jagellon regarded a flirtation with Mrs. Price as a blind to his real intentions, and was probably unaware that he was absorbing the exclusive favours of the lady, merely considering himself as one of a number.

However this might be, the Count was soon honoured with a considerable amount of envy by others of his own sex, while the more light-hearted freely offered bets that he would beat the present favourite.

He was even chaffed on the subject in the absence of Lord Uttoxeter. One day, when a party of men were eating a bit of luncheon in the tangled grass hard by a wood where they had been shooting pheasants and a rabbit or two, Hudson, refreshed with his luncheon, gave air to the following inquiry while he lay on the grass, cigar in mouth :—

“ Well, Jagellon, my boy, when is it coming off? ”

“ What? ” says the Count, indifferently.

“ Oh, nothing particular—that little affair with Mrs. P.”

“ My dear fellow, you don’t suppose I am going in for a *réchauffée* of Uttoxeter’s.”

“ Then why do you do it? ” returned Hudson.

“ Yes, that’s what beats me,” said another

man, who was critically examining a pheasant he had bagged.

“Why shouldn’t I?” asked Jagellon coolly. “One must amuse one’s self; and, hang it, she’s fair game!”

“The question is, is your price high enough for the dealer?” remarked Lord Thryburgh.

“If you fancy I am going to—well, *spoon* her, to put it coarsely,” retorted Jagellon, “you are infernally mistaken.”

So saying he rose and began loading his gun.

There was no appearance of ill-humour in his reply to the charge—only a tone of bored indifference to the whole thing.

One of the party declared he was a hard-hearted libertine, to trifle in this way with a lady’s heart, to which he coolly replied, “Ce n’est pas ma faute;” and then proposed that they should continue their sport.

However, he endeavoured to avoid the lady during the next day, without much success, the lady being too clever to be avoided, and Jagellon’s mind being too much occupied with something else to take much care to avoid her.

In the meantime Countess Woronzow saw and heard of and noted this little scandal.

It was agreed amongst the company that Madame was not so brilliant at Ladywell as she

usually was—the ladies said country life did not suit her disposition. She was more quiet and grave than as most of her friends knew her. Poor Countess! involved in difficulties as she was, and with her dearest friend away from her, it was not likely that she should be very gay. Her favourite companion was Gus Fipps. He rode out with her, and talked to her about Lucy, and showed her his letters to her (which were frequent), and her replies, which the Countess read and commented on most diligently. In short, they were almost always together; you would have said they were a pair of engaged lovers, only, as every one knew, Gus's affections were fixed elsewhere.

Once, indeed, they had a slight disagreement, which, happily, only served afterwards to strengthen their friendship. I regret to say that Count Jagellon was the cause of this momentary distrust of each other.

It was after that little conversation at the coverts, where Gus had been, and had heard in silence the chaff, and Jagellon's cool replies. Gus told the Countess about it the next evening while they were sitting together in one of the corners of the drawing-room. They had been talking about Lucy, and by a curious transition turned to speak of Jagellon. Gus said that he

was much less "wild," as he expressed it, than he used to be, and to this the Countess readily agreed.

"But," Gus said, "I wish, though, he had not made Mrs. Price's acquaintance. I am afraid he will get into a mess with her, and no good can come of it."

"Oh," replied Madame, indifferently, "it is nothing serious, I think."

"I don't know about that," Gus persisted; "they flirt awfully, and everybody talks about them." And then Gus gave a summary of the conversation above related.

Then the Countess turned on him. "It is mere scandal," she said, "and I don't believe it. I suppose you want to set me against him—and somebody else," she added.

Gus looked at her in astonishment.

Her face was set hard and cold, and her mouth had an angry pout about it.

"Upon my honour," Gus said, "I never thought of such a thing. I only told you what I had heard."

"Very possibly, and I dare say you were glad to hear it. For my part, I am not so ready to believe scandal."

Gus felt uncomfortably "shut up."

"I am sure I don't wish to believe it either,"

he said, "and I am sorry I ever said anything about it. However," he added, significantly, "you can see for yourself if there is any ground for it;" and he looked up the room to where Jagellon was lounging on a settee by Mrs. Price's side, laughing and talking, evidently in half whispers. Presently they saw Jagellon get up, go to the piano and begin playing a nocturne of Chopin's, while Mrs. Price sat still watching him, and scarcely replying to the remarks that were made to her by others near her.

When Jagellon had finished playing he got up from the piano and came up to Mrs. Price again. She said something to him, looking up half tenderly into his face, and he smiled a little as he replied to her.

He stood talking with her for a minute or two and then walked away, spoke to Mr. Hudson, and the two went out, evidently bound for the smoking or billiard room.

Madame de Woronzow watched him closely as he went out, and she fancied, but she could not be sure of it, that as he looked down for an instant, apparently at his dress boots, his eyes furtively glanced from under their lids at herself.

Meantime Gus had left her; evidently he was

hurt at her unjust accusation against himself. But she was not left alone—the hostess came directly afterwards and sat down by her to talk placidly to her, uttering plaintive grumblings about the weariness of her life, alternating between large parties of people who cared little for herself, and absolute loneliness. Her complaints were soon interrupted by General Bagrathion, Lord Uttoxeter, and one or two ladies joining them, and the poor Countess had to listen to their spoken nothings, and reply mechanically, while she was all the time thinking only on one subject, going over in her mind a perpetual iteration of “lieb mich, lieb mich nicht.”

Certainly the Countess was not very brilliant in conversation at this time. She was as handsome, she was as much admired as ever; nay, she had a strange fascination about her different to and more telling than men had formerly been used to. Her beauty seemed to be softer and more tender; before, she had inspired a feeling of awe at her loveliness, of fear at her wit and esprit—now, men approached nearer to her, they talked more openly to her, they endeavoured to tell her their highest aims and their best ideas—not very much to hear, perhaps, but she listened gravely to them and answered them gently;

and they, after being in her presence, had a dim suspicion that there was such a being as a real woman, such an one as they thought a woman ought to be.

I doubt whether she felt any inward satisfaction when she found that men and women still surrounded her, and that Mrs. Price was left to the care of a young importation from the City, one of those who have “plenty money and no brains,” and when, as she declared she must retire to rest, the drawing-room was simultaneously emptied of its occupants.

There certainly was a time when Ladywell was at peace, when the house was all dark and still, when the crickets’ chirp could be heard, and an owl in the trees hard by alone gave utterance to a distinct sound in an occasional and melancholy hoot.

There was said to be a ghost in one of the rooms of the house on the ground floor—the figure of a beautiful lady, who looked in at one of the Elizabethan windows, seemed to stand there a moment weeping bitterly, and then fade away. This story, always related to every fresh visitor by Rosencranz as a proof of the aristocratic character of his property, was never verified by any of the inhabitants of the place in the flesh. But this is no proof of its non-exist-

ence, for ghosts are probably timid creatures, and they would be certain to choose a time for their wanderings when they could surely escape detection.

And now in the still hours of the morning is the time for them. Not a living human creature is about. Hudson and one or two others have already crept upstairs, their steps accompanied now and then by a creak of the old staircase; they were fresh from their game of baccarat, and were thinking more of the laws of chance than of the existence of filmy ghosts.

The dogs in the stables have had a good deal of exercise during the daytime, and are fast asleep. There is that old owl in the old oaks, but if he sees anything you may depend upon it he will wisely keep it secret; and as to those bats whirring round the house, they are of too flighty natures to notice any customary spirits of the night.

So the airy sprites have now their turn, and perhaps they haunt more than one room; after all, *every* room may be haunted by the spirits of the past, those dreams of dead passions that once lived in the hearts of the living. They are dead long ago, but so passionate was their desire of life, so great was their longing for the earth, and

that one spot, that one life, to which they clung,  
that still their thirsty unquiet spirits may linger  
on the beloved spot.

Is it too wild a fancy to imagine that they  
haunt those pretty and handsome heads, nestled  
in soft pillows fringed with lace?

Eyes that are open, and are open wide be-  
cause they are in imagination gazing on some  
one whom they dare not always regard except  
in this lonesome hour.

Those lips which murmur some fond name in  
their dreams, are surely influenced by one of  
those spirits of the night.

Nay, is that merely a shadow thrown by a  
ray of the feeble moon, or is it some dim figure  
of the past? Not a woman apparently, but a  
dim, tall figure with a cloak on, his finely-shaped  
limbs appearing underneath the cloak, his face  
ghastly pale as he leans against the wardrobe,  
and his hand to his breast, concealing—what?  
Heavens! a mark of blood. He has been run  
through with a shining blade or shot to death!  
For a tavern brawl, a dispute over dice? Nay,  
then why haunt this ladies' chamber? Or is it  
a tale of two men on the green sward under the  
dark trees, who stand foot to foot to try, in  
their wild way, who is the best of the two, and  
which of them shall be loved by a fair lady?

And is there the spirit of some one by those dark trees, who passionately weeps and will not be comforted, though her fair body lies at rest in the old churchyard by the river?

Is it the spirit of an old love and an old jealousy that haunts this very room?

Very likely; for know, my dearly-beloved brethren, that love exists for ever; that four or five thousand years ago there were loves and fearful passions on the banks of the old Nile, which those everlasting monuments tell us of, as if it were but yesterday. And it all goes on just the same now; it has seen religions grow old and decay and die, and empires fall, and revolutions pour out men's blood on the earth.

Verily, verily, Love is the oldest of all the gods, and the ruler of all the earth!

## CHAPTER XVI.

LADYWELL (*continued*).—SPORTS AND PASTIMES.

THE morning breaks clear and fresh on the banks of the river at Ladywell, not foggy and weary, as it were, of yesterday's travail, as it does in London.

Soon the dogs in the stables begin to wake and bark as a token that they are ready for breakfast. Some bivouackers, who have pitched their tent near the Wycherley woods, begin to shout and sing while they pack up and make ready to proceed on their way up the river.

The big house is now astir, first in the stables, where the grooms are hissing as they brush down the horses; secondly, in the kitchen, where sleepy cooks and footmen, and ladies'-maids are collecting, and whence wreaths of smoke are making their way by means of some of the old chimneys; lastly, the guests of the house begin to make their appearance, mostly men, the ladies as a rule breakfasting in bed.

First and foremost there is Jagellon, together

with two others belonging to the race of muscular Christians, who emerge from the hall-door with great towels slung over their shoulders, bent on having a swim in the cool-flowing river. They make their way through a wicket on the left hand of the lawn, and go round the stables to a nice little bathing-place, fitted up with separate boxes, which stands by the boat-house. Soon these three are disporting themselves in the clear water, shouting, splashing, laughing, and spluttering like so many sea-lions. How fresh and clean they look as they emerge half an hour later from the bathing-place and walk off with great strides towards the house !

Jagellon's moustache and hair are crisply curled, and his face looks so cool and ruddy, and all the handsomer withal, set-off by his light-grey morning suit, which makes his shoulders look so broad.

Then there is Lord Thryburgh, with fat red and jolly complexion, and curly flaxen hair, as fine a specimen of John Bull as you would like to see. Hang it ! there is some life in the old aristocracy yet, only they say this specimen is rapidly ruining himself on the Turf.

Mr. C., the third, is, on the contrary, the son of a cotton-spinner, who started in life with a few pennies in his pocket. This fine son of his

has already pulled his University Boat to victory in the long struggle that ends at Mortlake.

I repeat, there is some life in the old race still, if it were only made use of. I would back these three against any gallants of the old time in doublet and hose.

“*Pardieu*, I feel better for that bathe,” says Jagellon, ceasing to whistle in order to make this remark. “I felt queerish before. Couldn’t sleep half the night. There was a cursed owl—”

“Oh, a fearful fowl!” interrupts Lord Thryburgh. “I couldn’t sleep at first; the beast’s hooting gave me the jumps.”

“I mean to prowl round after dark and see if I can’t brain the bird with a stone,” declares C.

Then they enter the house and sniff up the scent of breakfast with avidity.

In the breakfast-room they find the Baron and Baroness, and General Bagrathion, and two or three other men and staid matrons.

“Ah, here is a reinforcement!” cries Bagrathion; “now we are numerous enough to form a breakfast-party.”

“Ve vill set to work at once,” says the host. “Was the water not cold, eh?”

“Oh no, jolly—splendid!” ejaculated the

fresh ones, and then they set to at the breakfast. Presently in comes Gus, yawning; and then, by Jove! here is Madame de Woronzow quietly walking into the room. Half a dozen men start up to get a chair ready for her. Jagellon wins and holds out one for her; they just glance at one another as she smiles an acknowledgment of his courtesy—the most momentary glance—and their eyes mutually turn away. They were close together for a moment, and had a geni and a peri been there, they might have had another contest like that over Prince Camaralzaman and the fair Bادoura.

Madame graciously waives all claim to an apology for their beginning breakfast so soon; and then comes the question what are they all going to do on this day.

It is stated that the day is going to be fine, “and hot,” adds Lord Thryburgh; “there was a mist over the woods that looked like heat.”

“I say, it would be a good day for the river,” suggests Jagellon.

The proposal is received with acclamations, and the Baron issues orders for the steam-launch to be made ready and steam got up as soon as possible. Most of the morning convives declare they will make up the party. Madame

de Woronzow assents, and no sooner is the breakfast-table left with its meagre fragments than a bustle begins to make ready for departure (though they cannot go for an hour yet), while several men stroll down to the boat-house to smoke and inspect the scene.

Now about this time there is another little pastime, namely, the arrival of the postman. This personage has generally a bag full of letters, half of which are for Rosencranz and Bagratheon, the other half consisting of letters of every shape and colour—square, long, triangular; grey, white, pink; foreign, colonial; crested, with mottoes, with curious signs. And the postman has a high time of it while there is company at Ladywell; glasses of wine, half-crowns, crowns, and even sovereigns sometimes, are bestowed on him—Heaven only knows for what purposes. These letters are distributed to the various addressees, and to various bed and dressing rooms.

Madame de Woronzow, having obtained one from Lucy, adjourns to the reading-room, as it is called, and sits down to read and then ponder over it—especially over one passage in it, as follows:—

“I have been able to think a great deal about it all,” wrote Lucy, “while I have been idling

about here. Do you know what is the idea that I think of? Don't be angry, Theodora dear, if I tell you, because I want to tell you all I think. Is it possible he" (Jagellon, of course) "is in love with you, darling? Perhaps you will laugh at the idea, but I can, now I think of it, remember one or two things which looked as if he had some regard for you. For instance, the bitter way in which he spoke of you when I last saw him at your garden party—not as if he disliked you, but as if you had hurt him somehow.

"Oh, Theodora, I cannot help clinging to the idea, as a drowning person to a rope. Next to being loved myself, I would that he would fall in love with you. I should almost feel as if he did love me if he loved you; and you would love him a little, would you not, dearest Theodora, if only for my sake?"

Here she was interrupted by some one entering the room—Mr. Fipps. She looked round and folded up the letter.

"Gus," she said, "come here. I did not mean what I said to you last night."

"I know you did not," said Gus heartily; "never mind that, my dear Countess. Here is a long letter from Lucy, awfully interesting; I think you would like to see it."

"Yes, I should. I have one from her. Gus,

I will tell you one thing. Mind you keep faithful to her as long as you live, whatever may happen, for she is the dearest, most beautiful girl in the world.” As she spoke her beautiful dark eyes were swimming in tears.

“I know she is,” replied Gus, “and,” he went on, seizing one of her hands, “you are the next; I can see she is awfully fond of you: and so am I,” added Gus boldly.

“Well, if you won’t be vain, I will tell you that she praises you very much to me; she says she likes your letters so much,” said the Countess.

“Does she?” said Gus, delighted, when the door opened and Jagellon came in. A moment of silence and embarrassment Jagellon spoke first.

“I am sorry to interrupt you, but we are going off soon, and I have come to see who is coming.”

“Oh, thank you,” said Madame, “I will go and get ready.”

“You had better bring some wraps,” Jagellon went on; “it is rather cool in the evening, you know. If you haven’t a rug I will get you one.”

“Oh, I have got one,” she replied.

“Will you send it down,” he said, following her, “and I will take it to the steamer?”

“Thank you, but I can take them down myself.”

“If you would allow me, I could take them on board and secure you a good place.”

They had reached the hall by this time. She turned round to him as she said, “Oh, I don’t mind about it, thank you.” Then she went up the stairs.

Gus kept a diplomatic silence during this conversation, and then saying he should get on board at once, put on his hat and went out.

Jagellon waited about the hall. Presently who should come down but Mrs. Price, fresh from her morning toilet. She tripped downstairs quicker when she saw Jagellon.

“Good morning,” she said briskly, “where are you going?”

“Up the river,” he answered shortly.

“Are you going to row?”

“No; going in the steamer.”

“Are you? I will come too. Is there room?”

“Oh yes, plenty.”

“I’ll go and get ready. I won’t be a minute.”

“All right,” he said; “there’s no hurry.”

“Wait for me, will you? Will you?” she said, looking coquettishly over the balustrade.

“All right. D—n!” he added as soon as she was out of sight.

He waited on in hopes that the right one would come down first, and presently there was a rustling on the stairs above. He looked up and muttered another curse. Mrs. Price appeared, wrapping one light shawl round her, and holding another of a warmer material on her arm. He did not offer to carry the shawl; she did not ask him; she merely said gaily, “Come along,” and they went out of the house.

Countess Woronzow was the last to appear on the boat. What she had been doing to be so long I do not know. Of course room was made for her in the little saloon in the stern, General Bagrathion, who had ensconced himself there, gallantly giving her his place.

Jagellon and Mrs. Price sat together in the bow.

Then the boat glided from under the boathouse, turned round by the island and went steaming and puffing up the river.

The river season is now almost over, but there are still numbers of lovers of rowing and fishing and scenery on the water and on the banks, owing to the continuance of warm and comparatively fine weather. The steamer comes upon punts moored round a bend of the river or up a little

creek, in which vessels are two or three men seated motionless and silent, as they watch the ends of their lines ; or it is a man standing by the flow of a lasher throwing out his line with a swish into the fast-running stream.

They overtake large boats quite full of men in white, wearing outlandish hats bedecked with ribbons, and ladies in various costumes not to be tolerated in staid London. Sometimes the party is being steadily towed up the river by two stalwart men without shoes or stockings and with their calves bare, for the river is rather full, and there are some little swamps to go through occasionally.

Another pretty sight, which especially interests the ladies on board the rapid steamer, is an occasional light skiff coming smoothly down stream sculled by a brown-visaged young fellow, and containing one passenger in the stern, who pretends to steer the light vessel—a young lady with fresh complexion and nice new dress, with a certain dignified matronly air about her. Thus these young pairs go airily floating down the river *vis-à-vis*—on their honeymoon perhaps, or very nearly a honeymoon.

To these dear young couples life is as yet only a pleasure trip up and down a river. Ah ! if marriage was always a row on the river by

green woods and islets fringed with weeping willows, amidst pretty villas and gardens and warm sunshine, and if love was a young couple in a boat, one pulling, the other steering ! Bother this old world ! Why will it change ? Those green trees are growing brown and yellow. In a few weeks their bereaved branches will be swaying to and fro in the wintry wind, the flowers in the gardens will be all gone, the boats will be safely stowed away, and there is left only dreary work and heartaches and headaches.

Madame stands by the side of the steam-launch watching all this little life and scenery with great interest. She declares it is prettier than the Rhine—it looks so happy and comfortable. This sentiment is hailed with delight by the insular natives on board, who unanimously declare that the Thames is as good as any river in Europe in its way.

Mr. C., the University stroke, becomes quite a hero on the occasion, and has to go through the story of his aquatic victory for Madame's benefit, amidst running commentaries from the others, as—"No, you were not more than half a length behind at the bridge ;" and, "My dear fellow, they were close on to you at Chiswick ;" and so on.

The time seemed to pass so quickly that

they would have gone much too far away from home had not their appetites given warning that they had better put a limit to their voyage, so the steamer was brought to at a nice hotel with a little garden reaching down to the river. Here they disembarked, and Rosencranz ordered a lunch for the party. A plain and simple luncheon it was—cold beef and a pigeon-pie or two, and some ripe fruit and a little wine, the best that the hotel could provide, and it was by no means to be despised. This repast they partook of in a little room, only just large enough to hold them all, standing and sitting. They were sixteen in number.

“This is delicious!” said Madame Woronzow, as she ate her beef with an appetite. “Is there no poet amongst us to recite verses, or a scholar—come—to translate Horace for us—‘Sub tegmine fagi,’ you know, and all the rest of it?”

“I’ve forgotten it, or I would spout something,” said Mr. C., while he whisked her plate away. “Have some pie now, will you?”

The men did most of the waiting. There was only one waiter proper for them.

“No more, thank you; I shall be gorged. I shall be incapable of moving if I have any more,” said Madame, laughing, in reply to Mr. C.’s reiterated offers. At last he persuaded her

to have some peaches and another glass of champagne.

Mr. C. was a leading man on the occasion, as he stood by Madame de Woronzow chatting to her, while General Bagrathion and Rosencranz and Lord Thryburgh also put in a word here and there.

Meanwhile Jagellon had, after making himself useful, by carving beef and pies and by deftly drawing corks, ensconced himself by the window, where he was eating some pigeon-pie on his knee. Thence he was called to the table by Mrs. Price, who made a narrow place for him by drawing round her her silken skirts, and compelled him to sit by her side. So situated, with Jagellon on one side and Lord Uttoxeter on the other, she kept up a double flirtation with great skill. Her laughter and chaff were all for Uttoxeter, her eyes and voluptuous grace for Jagellon ; and as she whispered some criticism on some one else in his ear, her sweet-smelling hair brushed against his cheek, and her soft shoulder leaned against his.

If woman is frail, man is only the male of the species ; and the only excuse for Jagellon is, perhaps, that no man could entirely resist the fascinations of an enrapturing woman, very pretty, and evidently possessed by a strong passion for

him. So their hands would meet now and then, and their eyes would look into each other's for a moment, and her red lips would laugh nervously as she looked at him. Gus, looking at them from across the table, thought, with a feeling of dismay—"By Jove! it is all over with him;" and others of the company whispered to one another, laughing. Madame de Woronzow did not seem to heed them, but went on chatting with Mr. C. and General Bagrathion.

When lunch was ended the party scattered. Some walked along the bank, some strolled in the gardens of the hotel, and others sat quiet and smoked and talked indoors. Lord Uttoxeter went to look after a "devilish pretty barmaid he had spotted," and one or two other men accompanied him. Thus one or two strange companionships were formed.

Gus went off with Baroness Rosencranz (her spouse was after the barmaid), General Bagrathion contrived to find Madame de Woronzow, with whom he strolled about the garden.

Presently Jagellon, who had at last contrived to get separated from his "clog," came into the garden from a walk by the river, where he had been smoking with Lord Thryburgh and Hudson. Seeing Madame de Woronzow he at once came towards her.

“Don’t let me interrupt your conversation,” he said. “I suppose we shall start back soon?” Before the General could reply Madame Woronzow said calmly—

“Yes, I think so. We are talking over a little business now, so if you don’t mind leaving us a moment——” Then looking him full in the face she said very quietly, “See, there is Mrs. Price all by herself, you had better go and entertain her.”

Jagellon hesitated a moment, with a look of half-anger, half-reproach in his eyes. Then he turned round. “Very well,” he said shortly, and walked off straight to where Mrs. Price was sitting on a garden-seat.

Madame turned to Bagrathion to continue the conversation, and saw a well-satisfied smile fading from his face and a little twinkle in his eye. Perhaps that slight smile decided Bagrathion’s fate. For women are such odd beings. You may thrash them or kick them and they will continue to love you, whereas a chance expression on your face, or a sentence uttered at random, will make them hate you for ever.

However that may be, General Bagrathion and Madame de Woronzow continued their conversation as if nothing had occurred until it was

time to re-embark, and then they and the other voyagers assembled on board, the steamer's bows were turned home, and she glided swiftly on her way down the river. Already the sun was near his bed in the west, the trees on the banks were throwing long shadows on the land, anglers had finished their day's sport, and were marching homeward along the towing-path with well-filled basket and rod in hand, and the river was nearly emptied of boats; only now and then the steamer passed a boat's crew rowing rapidly down stream to their night's lodging.

And on board this craft of the Baron's there was only an occasional talking, a murmured word or two here and there, and while they swiftly sped down stream, men lay about the boat and women sat looking at the passing banks, a busy town, a pretty villa, a pretty wood tinged with autumn tints and the gold of the setting sun.

Some man had brought a guitar with him and began to play a few airs, to which the others listened languidly. Then one volunteered a song, and after him another, and then a lady. Some one asked Jagellon, who was lying lazily on the deck, to sing, and he gave them Gounod's "Berceuse." The music seemed to be a fitting accompaniment to their swift and easy course

down stream, only pausing now and then at a lock, then gliding on as easily as ever.

After Jagellon had sung there was a pause. Every one wanted more music, and the men tried to persuade one lady after another to favour them, but they were afraid of their delicate throats ; the sun was setting, the air was growing cool, and ladies wrapped their cloaks and shawls closely round them. Then Lord Thryburgh, bolder than the rest, asked Madame de Woronzow if she would sing them one song to please them all. She expressed no objection except that she remembered nothing to sing.

Then said Lord Uttoxeter, “I wish we could have ‘Qual cor’ again.”

“Yes,” said Thryburgh ; “I wish we could hear it once again.”

For the Countess had sent a drawing-room full of people into raptures with this aria on one occasion at a musical party. She was now pressed on all sides.

“Well, but who am I to sing it with ?” she said laughing.

“Oh, Jagellon can sing it with you,” suggested Lord Thryburgh. “Jagellon, you know ‘Qual cor tradisti,’ don’t you ?”

“Yes,” answered Jagellon shortly, without moving from his recumbent position. There is

such a thing as love in a sulk. And now there was another difficulty—who was to play the accompaniment? for the owner of the guitar knew not the air. However, Madame Woronzow, to the delight of all, said she thought she could play it, and the guitar being presented to her, she ran her fingers over it, and began to sing. The river was silent now, the sun had set, a star here and there was twinkling in the sky, and Madame sat in the entrance to the little cabin, Jagellon near her, and the others standing or squatting round the singers.

“ *Qual cor tradisti, qual cor perdisti,  
Quest’ ora orenda ti manifesti* ”

Her clear voice, with a singular quiet pathos in it, seemed to linger behind on the water like the track of the steamer. The rowers of a boat let their oars rest on the water whilst they listened to the passing music. A group of young men and maidens on the lawn of a house by the water stood listening as the boat and the singer passed by. Then Jagellon joined in, and his rich voice rang out across the water. They seemed to be talking to one another, did these two singers, uttering the thoughts of their hearts in music, and the eyes of the listeners were riveted on their faces, as if they thought that

they were listening to some sad love tale. As Jagellon's voice dropped into a whisper and the music ceased there was an absolute silence, till some lady said, "Very pretty!" and General Bagrathion said, "It is sublime!" Then everybody moved and began to utter enthusiastic praises. Jagellon rose up lazily, saying, "I feel thirsty with all this singing," and walked off from the rest of the company, regardless of their compliments, and laid himself down again after drinking a glass of champagne.

After this there was no more singing; they talked a little, but there was a universal silence on board, as the boat crept slowly between the island and the garden of the house in the deepening twilight, while the lights of the house shone on the lawn and glittered from afar on the rippling water.

Dinner was nearly over when the voyagers entered the dining-room, but the rest of the company stayed at table to listen to the story of their pleasant excursion; and after a lounge in the drawing-room, and a quiet cigar in the smoking-room, every one went early to bed—some to sleep, some to dream, and one or two to think fondly of some one else before they closed their eyes.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## JEALOUISES.

ON the day after the excursion up the river, Madame de Woronzow pleaded a headache as an excuse for staying in her room the greater part of the morning and afternoon, where she was only visited by the hostess and one or two ladies. Part of this time she occupied in writing a long letter to Lucy, telling her all the doings at Ladywell, and about Gus, and a little about Jagellon. "I do not think," she wrote, "you are right in saying that he is in love with me. I know, and I am thankful for it, that I have some influence over him. But, my dearest Lucy, I fear his is too light and frivolous a mind ever to become firmly attached to any one. I really think he was attached to you for a short time, and I think, too, that he had a great regard for me, but I cannot help seeing that his gay habits have transformed his nature from what it might have been into an easy and changeable sort of man. I should dread the thought of his fixing

his affections on myself, lest such a hopeless passion—as, darling, you know it must be—should decide his course in life for the worse."

Her time being thus occupied with her correspondence, the Countess did not make her appearance till dinner-time, and did not stay long in the drawing-room after dinner.

Thus Jagellon saw very little of her, and was unable to speak once to her. He went out shooting in the morning and afternoon; and though he took down Mrs. Guiness Price to dinner, said very little over the meal, and left the drawing-room almost immediately after Madame de Woronzow's departure, and played billiards till bedtime.

The next day was Sunday, and Madame, having asked for the brougham, drove off to a Catholic chapel in a neighbouring town, and heard mass in company with a few poor Irish, and one or two respectable Catholic shopkeepers, whose attention to the service was much distracted by the counter attraction of the beautiful Countess.

Two respectable ladies out of the whole of the company honoured the village church with their presence. Of the rest, several of the men played lawn tennis during the greater part of the day, some of the ladies went for a drive, and

Jagellon drove to a stud a few miles off with Lord Thryburgh, to inspect some mares and yearlings, and they only returned to dinner.

In this way it happened that two days passed without Jagellon and Madame de Woronzow exchanging a word ; and, on the other hand, the fair Mrs. Price had very little opportunity of carrying on her desperate flirtation with the handsome Count.

The next day, however, was one of those black days at Ladywell—a pouring wet day—an unbroken grey sky and a hopelessly steady rain. One or two men in despair went for a ride with mackintosh coats on ; the rest were hopeless prisoners indoors. Some, indeed, contrived to pass away the time. Hudson and Lord Thryburgh and one or two others played cards all day. Others stuck to the billiard-room. Lord Uttoxeter, being in want of amusement, took possession of Mrs. Price in the most husband-like manner, made her talk to him and pet him all the morning, and after lunch they were discovered chatting together in a quiet room, and thus furnished an occasion for talking scandal to the rest—a theme for conversation by no means to be despised. The rest of the company read novels and roamed aimlessly from room to room in a condition of ennui.

Now, Jagellon had accepted a challenge from General Bagrathion to play a game at chess, at which the General was an adept ; and, in fact, he won every game from his opponent, notwithstanding a concession of a piece for each game. It is only fair to Jagellon to say that, though not a first-rate player, he did not play up to the mark on this occasion, as he was all the time playing another and a deeper game. In the first place, he was determined to say something to Madame de Woronzow at the first opportunity, and as he feared she was avoiding him, he was trying to throw her off her guard, and at the same time prevent Bagrathion from monopolizing her ; for he had a jealous suspicion of the General ever since that rencontre up the river. In furtherance of this plot he adroitly gave place to another chess-player just before luncheon time, so that the game was left unfinished when the players went in to lunch, and, as he had calculated, they renewed the contest later in the afternoon.

After lunch he watched every opportunity of catching Madame de Woronzow alone. In this he was not very successful. After chatting with some people after lunch, the Countess went into the library, where she remained reading, and there were always two or three people in the room besides herself.

To get to the library, you were obliged to pass through another room, which was called the study, and in this room Jagellon stationed himself, pretending to read a French novel, but in reality occupying himself in noticing every one who went in or out of the next room. It was not till nearly dinner-time that he saw his opportunity. The last person but one he thought had come out, and he got up and went in. The Countess was sitting over a table absorbed in a book. For some reason his entry startled her ; she looked up quickly and then went on reading. Jagellon hesitated a moment ; now he had his chance he almost feared to take it. At last—

“ Madame,” he said, “ will you allow me to ask you one question—have I offended you ? ”

She sat up in her chair and looked at him. “ No,” she said shortly.

“ But you avoid me ; you refuse to let me do you the least—the smallest civility. I cannot see you scarcely ; I cannot speak a word to you. If you wish me to go, say so, and I will go. Why will you not tell me what you wish, and I will obey you ? ” He had come up to the table, emboldened as he continued speaking, and he stood before her somewhat in the attitude of a criminal before his judge.

"I do not wish you to do anything. I do not wish you to go away." So saying she rose, put the book back on its shelf, and turned to leave the room.

Of course she had to pass him, and she could not resist looking at him an instant. He was standing still by the table with a look of utter dejection on his face. She hesitated for a moment, and this gave him another chance.

He turned to her. "Why will you not tell me my fault? You see I am ignorant of it. No one can sin in ignorance. Has any one said anything against me?" looking into her face. "Do you—do you doubt me? Tell me." Silence. "Has Bagrathion—" she looked up. "Has he said anything about me?"

"No; what should he say?"

"I don't know. Has he?"

"No, certainly not."

"Will you give me your word he has not said anything about me?" He was looking almost fiercely at her.

"He has never said a word to me about you."

"Ah, but has he insinuated anything? I remember now," he went on as if to himself, "he looked very much pleased when you repulsed me the other day."

"I did *not* repulse you. I told you I was talking business—you know what about—with Bagrathion, that was all."

"Good heavens!" she thought, "is *he* jealous?"

"Then what did you tell me to go to Mrs. Price for? You know what she is, and you must know I detest her."

"I do not believe you," she answered softly.

"What! is it possible?" he exclaimed; "are you deceived like the rest? *Can you believe*," he went on, in a low voice, "that I care a rap for her or any other woman besides—besides—Ah, it is too bad!"

There was a moment's silence, while he turned away, clenching his fists in his passion. She stood perfectly still, with downcast eyes, and a slight blush on her cheeks. Then he turned to her again, changing his tone to one of reproach.

"Will you never trust me, then?" he said. "Will nothing—no amount of proof—no words, nor acts, nor anything, convince you that I am true? Do you think I should ever believe anything against you? If the whole world—"

She interrupted him. "Why, it was only just now that you suspected I had been influenced by General Bagrathion. What

possible cause, what right, have you to be jealous of him?" she said, indignantly, turning the tables on him. At this moment the door of the room opened just a little, but they were too much engrossed in their own conversation to notice it.

"How can I help being jealous of him? You talk to him—you sit at dinner with him—"

"I do *not*, any more than with any other person."

"Except me. Me only you avoid. Send me away. Say plainly you don't like me. I will obey you; I will never see you again if you tell me not."

"I do not wish you to go away," she answered very slowly.

"Treat me as you please. Make me the object of your contempt, if you like, but do not doubt that I will be true to you. Why should you? It is not that you doubt me, but yourself—your own power and perfection."

"Of course I don't wish to do that," she answered, laughing. Adding, "I must go now; it must be dinner-time."

"And you will not be offended any more?" taking her hand.

“No; but you must not be so *needlessly* jealous.”

“I should never be jealous if you were always like this.”

“*A bientôt*, then,” she said, and taking her hand from his opened the door and——

In the next room was General Bagrathion quietly reading a newspaper.

He was sitting, as it were, at the back of the door; he could not have *seen* anything, she swiftly thought—how much had he *heard*? He rose as she came into the room to open the other door for her, looking at her steadily. Her face changed so rapidly when she saw him that he could scarcely notice the flash of intense surprise in it. She actually rubbed her eyes as if she was dazed with reading. All women are actresses when—in certain circumstances.

“It is nearly dinner-time, is it not?” she said; “I have been reading so hard I did not know how the time went.”

“A love story?”

“No” (quietly), “‘L’Histoire d’une Crime,’—or rather *blunder*, I should call it—wouldn’t you, General?” She glanced at him and saw the shot had hit, by the sudden frown on his face. He held the door open with one hand, the newspaper in the other, evidently waiting till she had

gone. "Why, you are not dressed," she said; "come along, or we shall both be disgracefully late."

"I am not hungry, and I want to finish this article," holding up the paper.

"Well, I must be off. Oh, would you go and get my shawl? I left it in the breakfast-room, I think—one of those rooms there."

"Perhaps you left it in the library." He made a step towards the opposite door.

"No, I hadn't it there. Never mind, if you are so anxious about your article."

"Are you sure it's in the breakfast-room?"

"Yes, quite. Be quick, I want it."

He dare not or could not refuse, and went out with her.

Now the study door opened on to a corridor leading into the hall, where was the door of the breakfast-room. The General therefore calculated that he could see from the breakfast-room door if any one came out of the study. So, when the Countess had sped upstairs he went into the breakfast-room, glanced hastily round the room, did not see any shawl, and came out again directly. There was no one in the corridor, and no one in the hall but a couple of servants. He loitered about for a minute or two.

“Just go and tell Madame de Woronzow I cannot find her shawl anywhere,” he said to one of the servants, and then returned to the study. No one there. He walked into the library. It was empty! He looked round to see whether there was any place to hide in, but there were the book-shelves, the centre table, two side-tables and chairs, that was all. He looked towards the window—it was shut.

“*Sacré!*” he muttered as a lady came in.

She expressed some surprise at seeing him there, and as he was making some excuse about looking for a book the gong sounded and he was obliged to leave the room, the lady following him.

As he mounted the stairs the guests were just going in to dinner, and there, to his astonishment, was Count Jagellon with Mrs. Guiness Price on his arm! Bagrathion, utterly bewildered, went to his room.

He had heard about half that conversation between Jagellon and the Countess. He could have sworn it was Jagellon’s voice, though he had spoken low and in a peculiar way during the latter part of the interview. But here he was in the drawing-room.

The explanation of this difficulty is easy to relate. Jagellon, hearing Bagrathion’s voice,

and gathering from what he heard the Countess saying that she did not want him to be seen, no sooner heard them go than he unbolted the window and got out, closing the window (a window with heavy mullions opening French fashion) after him. Bagrathion had not had time to examine the bolts.

He then ran round the back of the house, went in by the gun-room, whence he flew up another flight of stairs, generally used by the servants, to his room. Watkins was there waiting for him.

“For God’s sake, get me dressed as soon as possible. I must be in the drawing-room before dinner,” he said.

Master and man set to work. Watkins put on his shirt while he arrayed himself in trousers; he dipped his face in the basin, just took the soap in his hands, and then dried face and hands. Watkins during this time arranged a made-up tie in his shirt-collar. Then the waist-coat and coat were pulled on, and after a slight brushing of hair Jagellon ran downstairs as the gong was sounding, went up to Mrs. Guinness Price in the drawing-room, who jumped up to meet him, and so it all came to pass.

Madame Woronzow came into the dining-room about ten minutes after they had all sat

down. She glanced round the table, saw Jagellon demurely eating of the same course as every one else—and Bagrathion absent; he came in a minute or two after her. It was remarked in the smoking-room after dinner that Countess Woronzow had quite recovered her brilliancy; she had led the conversation from the time she sat down to table.

Jagellon, on the other hand, had scarcely spoken a word, and only replied in monosyllables to his mortified neighbour.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## A LITTLE SCANDAL.

THAT it rained quite hopelessly the next day was doubtless in order to prove the truth of two ancient saws—imprimis, that it never rains but it pours; secondo, that misfortunes never come singly.

The dismay of the inhabitants of Ladywell was loud-voiced at having to endure everybody's company for another whole day. One or two people took the opportunity of leaving, but they were replaced by others, who probably considered it a good opportunity for travelling, having nothing better to do.

However, the majority of the inhabitants held a parliament for the purpose of considering what they should do.

Theatricals were proposed and rejected on the ground that they had not an acting set in the house; that they had neither dresses nor scenery; and, finally, that it was too much of a bore to get up the thing.

Some ladies proposed a dance, which was objected to on account of fewness of people. But Rosencranz declaring that he thought some of the neighbouring houses would send some contingents, the proposal was at length agreed to, more from the fact of every one being tired of the discussion than from any enthusiasm for the Terpsichorean art. The greater part of the morning was employed in this discussion, and the afternoon was devoted to talking scandal in the smoking-room and one of the other rooms.

“ My belief is it’s a *fait accompli*,” declared Hudson, puffing out a volume of smoke to give emphasis to his remark.

“ What, since they went up the river? It is not possible; he never had the chance,” argued Gus.

“ I think they quarrelled on the steamer,” suggested Lord Thryburgh.

“ But he took her down to dinner only yesterday,” put in another man.

“ He is playing a deep game,” asserted Bagrathion. “ Going to run away, I expect.”

“ I wish he would,” said Hudson. “ Fancy old Uttoxeter’s face!”

“ Fancy Mr. P.’s!” added another.

“ I say, let’s get it out of his man,” suggested Lord Thryburgh.

“ You might as well ask his coat,” said Gus.

“ Oh, he would tell for a fiver,” said Hudson.  
“ Let us subscribe.”

So the party collected that amount in sovereigns and half-sovereigns. Then the question arose, who should ask Watkins? Lord Thryburgh declared he would “ bell the cat,” and at once went off to find Watkins.

During his absence General Bagrathion stated the case with military precision.

“ It stands thus,” he said. “ He has been flirting—what do you call it?”

“ Spooning,” suggested some one.

“ Spooning—that’s it—Mrs. Price all the time up to Saturday. He is not seen with her on that day or the next, and only at dinner yesterday. Well, he’s either rejected, or they have settled it between them. You’ll see they will leave together, either openly or secretly.”

This was Bagrathion’s opinion.

Presently Lord Thryburgh came back.

“ Well?” inquired the others.

“ He says he does not know anything about it; but he said in confidence that he thought Jagellon was sweet on her, so he said, but that nothing had been arranged or he would know of it.”

“ I told you so,” said Gus. “ You might as

well have asked him who is going to win the Cæsarewitch."

And then they fell to discussing that race.

Meantime a parallel discussion took place among some ladies assembled in what was called the music room.

"It is disgraceful! Why should we have to tolerate such a person? The worst of it is one is obliged to meet all sorts of people here." (The hostess was not present.) "I shall leave if it goes on," declared one lady, who rejoiced in being able to save some household expenses by staying at Ladywell and at other houses.

"Is she not a relation of Lord Uttoxeter's?" asked a young lady.

"Oh dear no," replied an old dowager. "But I do not believe there is much to blame in her intimacy with Lord Uttoxeter. He is a queer man, you know, and is always petting people."

"I believe she would not object to going further with him if she could," said another lady. "Her manner with him would suggest such an idea."

"No doubt," assented the dowager. "But the point is her behaviour with Count Jagellon—it is too palpable."

“Flagrant!”—“Scandalous!”—“Disgraceful!” echoed the others.

“Of course the Count is to blame,” said Madame Woronzow, who had been demurely listening to this gossip.

“Of course,” said the dowager, somewhat deferentially, “but still that does not make her conduct better.”

“I think,” proceeded Madame, now taking up the theme decisively as a sort of President of the little Senate,—“I think we should wait and see what comes of it. It must end one way or another, and then we can decide the question. For my part, I do not think we are severe enough at first in such cases. A lady who is a friend of such a man as Lord Uttoxeter ought not to be received in our houses.”

This suggestion was caught up at once; several ladies declared they should not ask Mrs. Price to their respective houses in future; and having come to this decision, the assembly broke up to dress for dinner—and dancing.

Now, does the uninitiated person suppose that the culprits on whom so much judgment had been passed had done anything extremely *outré*? Not at all. The simple fact was that the society of Ladywell had understood that they were going to be regaled with a very pretty

scandal, and they were bitterly disappointed to find that after all it did not seem to be "coming off."

Mrs. Guiness Price and Count Jagellon, the culprits in question, had scarcely spoken to one another for days. What did it all mean? It was most annoying.

And does the uninitiated person suppose that people began to behave coolly to this naughty couple? Not a bit of it. Here is Mrs. Price herself going upstairs to dress just as some of the members of the above-mentioned parliament, based on womanhood suffrage, wander into the hall.

"My dear Mrs. Price, have you been able to amuse yourself?"

"Oh, I have been reading Belot's last all the afternoon. Quite a horrid story! don't you think so?"

"I have not read it; is it very bad?"

"Oh, ghastly!—one has to skip all over the place," says pretty Mrs. Price, yawning.

And here is Count Jagellon coming *down* stairs from quite the opposite direction. Is it not provoking?

"Have you been up to the tower to read the signs of the weather?" asks Madame de Woronzow of him as she passes up the broad stairs.

“I’ve been fast asleep,” he says; and he is evidently speaking the truth, to judge by his general appearance, his hair hanging over his forehead, and his eyes blinking. “I shall have a cigarette, just to pull me together.”

“You’ll be late for dinner,” says Mrs. Price.

“No, I shall take care to be in time,” he says, glancing round at Madame de Woronzow.

And so he is. When every one is in the drawing-room, he is standing there talking to Countess Woronzow, and when the gong sounds for dinner, and every one begins to move, he is by the Countess’s side; then she takes his arm, and together they go downstairs to dinner. General Bagrathion follows them with Mrs. Price on his arm; and while he talks audibly to her about the weather, or something of the kind, he listens for what the preceding couple may say. But they are silent as they descend arm-in-arm to the dining-room.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## AMORE VECORS.

THE company was rather boisterous that day over dinner—no wonder, after having been pent up in the house, doing nothing all day long. Jagellon especially was as a giant refreshed with sleep, and in that happy condition he became a perfect buffoon.

He began by inquiring what every one had been doing while he was asleep, and then invented for them their own pursuits, accusing them of all sorts of absurd things.

And it was a curious thing that he attacked not the ladies so much as the men ; and as most of them were conscious that they had been talking about him, they were at first at a loss how to reply to his chaff, until they grew confident in their numbers, and all began to chaff him in return.

The ladies were not slow to join in the affray of words, and soon every one seemed to be bantering every one else.

Madame de Woronzow was particularly merry, and was foremost in teasing her neighbour, who always replied in a tone of gallantry ; nor could the others perceive that he was continually looking at the Countess and expressing to her a number of little “madrigaux” under cover of his continual buffoonery.

There were only two people who did not seem to join in the general badinage, namely, General Bagrathion, who only smiled grimly and said a word now and then, and Mrs. Price, who was *distraite*, and her face was flushed as if with wine.

With all this laughing and talking and chaffing, dinner was soon over, and then after the repast, what with fresh guests arriving, and what with the younger men hastening to the drawing-room, and what with the dancing beginning at nine o'clock, there was no time to digest and smoke, so that they all literally seemed to sit down to eat and drink and rise up to play and dance.

With the dancing the confusion and *tapage* grew worse. Everybody had been thinking of something else, and no programme had been fixed upon, so the dances were chosen according to the wish of the company, and the consequence was that generally only a few people knew what

the dance was until the music began, then all was hurry and scurry for partners and places. As may be imagined, in such a democratic method of conducting a ball, waltzes and polkas predominated. The confusion reached its height in a mad freak of Jagellon's. That man was as wild or wilder than he had been over dinner. He was never at rest; he seemed to be always aiming at some bizarre form of dancing, now hand-in-hand in a waltz, then hand-over-head in a polka; he was like a *blasé* man seeking for some new pleasure, ever more piquant. It was possibly for this reason that he suddenly seized hold of Mrs. Price and carried her off, nothing loth, from her partner into the midst of a waltz, and as they went round in the dance she clung to him with her arm almost round his neck and her head against his shoulder, so that her lithe body with the folds of her ample dress seemed to fasten on to him.

In such a case, with a woman so evidently seized with love, or what you like, it would not have been surprising if Jagellon had responded in some way to her embrace, instead of which he seemed utterly callous to and regardless of her. The waltz was one of the slow and sentimental sort, and it did not seem to suit his mood; he stopped suddenly.

“This is too slow,” he said. “I’ll play them a waltz. Come along, I will get you a partner.” So saying, he detached himself from her arms and led her out of the *mélée* of dancers.

Bagrathion was standing near.

“I say, Bagrathion, Mrs. Price wants a partner. I am going to play,” he said and marched off.

He easily persuaded the lady who was playing to let him take her place. Then with two or three crashing chords to start with, he played a curious sort of waltz or polonaise, a thing with a simple air, changing into extraordinary variations, but with a rhythm all through it that was irresistible.

At first the dancers exclaimed against the music being stopped, and wanted to know what it was all about, but presently their feet seemed to feel the rhythm of the music, and one and all started off whirling up and down the ball-room. Nay, every one was infected. Bagrathion had intended to have a quiet little intrigue with Mrs. Price, but he was obliged to dance with her, though unused to the nimble art.

There is little fat Rosencranz puffing and blowing as he dances down the room with a tall lady forcing him on. Here comes Gus, his little legs going like the governors of a steam-

engine. Room for my Lord Uttoxeter ! with his face bedewed with perspiration, his big body bumping against this person and that, and his legs clumsily catching against chairs and in ladies' trains.

Look out in front ! Here comes the Baroness Rosencranz, no longer placid, but as a devastating whirlwind she rushes on resistless. It is no joke, for once her massive silk dress catches against your legs it will send you down infallibly. Fancy some huge crocodile gone ravaging mad and waltzing round on the baked mud of the Nile, its scaly tail raising the wind as it whizzes round—that is the nearest comparison to the Baroness.

Is society gone mad ?

There is Mrs. Price with her teeth set hard and eyes flashing—really she does look rather queer. There are one or two aged ladies who have crept into the corner of the room and into the embrasures of the windows in their fright at the mad rout.

Madame Woronzow has seated herself under shelter of the grand piano and looks on at the dancers with calm astonishment. She is the only sane person there, apparently, besides the musician, who is, outwardly at least, cool and collected. He sits there quietly, while his hands

range at their own wild will over the piano (they seem to be doing as they please, without his will guiding them), and he ever and anon steals a look at the Countess near him, superb and beautiful, and whispers sometimes a word or two to her.

At last she directs a wistful glance at the door, which he interprets as a wish to leave this mad dance, and his hands stop their exercise; he rises and offers the Countess his arm.

Then a Babel of voices, a fresh tumult arises. Dizzy, they sink on to chairs, on to the floor. Madame Rosencranz sinks, a flaccid mass, on the nearest seat; her husband mops his dewy brow, Gus cries out for something to cool his parched tongue, and "Oh, my head! it is all over the place!" says one; "If I haven't something to drink I shall burst!" says another. The idea spreads, and with one accord they flock out of the room, and spread themselves over the house in search of liquids and fresh air; only a few fanatical dancers and old ladies are left to contemplate the scene of the *mélée*.

The whole house is filled with the noise of laughing and talking; on the stairs, in the hall, the dining-room, the library, people talk and laugh and flirt. Solitary couples ensconce themselves in corners, and get found out and laughed

at. Mr. C. has got the rosette of a lady's shoe, and is looking about for its fellow. It is rumoured that a lady has taken five to one against her kissing Rosencranz; the rumour is scouted.

"Ah, ah! I am afraid of you; you are a sorceress, a pretty Circe," says one of a pair to the other, as they sit in the dining-room over champagne.

"A roundabout way of saying I am bewitching," replies Mrs. Price.

"Bewitching is too feeble a term; you enslave, torture, transform men. I have an example before my eyes," says Bagrathion.

"Who? I was not aware of it."

"Is it possible? Are you so ignorant of your power?"

"Well, whom do you mean?"

"Who? Why, a big man with a foreign name, eh?"

"Pooh! Nonsense!"

"Is it nonsense? Ha, ha! We hear of nothing but the divine Mrs. Price, the exquisite beauty, all day. Poor fellow!"

"As if I believe you! Perhaps *you* are jealous."

"So I am."

Specimen flirtation of the place and the hour.

So the wine flows and the night goes, with ever-changing love-making. It is growing late; a carriage or two are taking away wearied guests, people lounge on the stairs, reluctant to go to bed, and the rooms of the house grow quieter, and so—how it comes about the fates only know—Mrs. Price is alone with Jagellon in the chess-room.

Where are all the people now? why are they not here to see and understand? Well, there is one listening attentively at the half-closed door. Bagrathion has steadily tracked them to their tryst.

“I want you to do me a favour,” he hears the little voice say.

“What is it?”

“Guess.”

“Do you want some money?” smiling.

“No—that is—well, can you lend me some?”

“How much? A hundred?”

“Yes, that will do. Thanks, very much. How shall I repay you?” looking at him with a vague smile.

“Oh, never mind that. I will give you a cheque to-morrow morning, if that will do.”

“Oh, yes; thanks.”

He made a motion as if to leave the room.

“But stop a bit, that’s not all,” she said.

“What is it, then?”

“Oh, but you must guess.”

“Haven’t the least idea.”

“Well, what do you think? Come, say.”

“Do you want me to thrash somebody?”

laughing.

“Oh, dear no.”

“Tell me. I cannot think of anything.”

She hesitated; a last remnant of modesty baulked her. She stood with her hands before her, nervously clasping and unclasping them. At last she spoke, hesitatingly and almost in a whisper—

“You do not seem the same to me. Why do you not? What have I done? I—I do not know what to say.” Then suddenly she put her hands to her face, and burst into tears.

As soon as she began speaking, as soon as he understood her meaning, he was dumbfounded, aghast—he did not know what to do. What could he do? He did, perhaps, the worst thing he could have done—he told her the truth.

“My dear Mrs. Price,” he said, taking one of her hands, while with the other she sought her handkerchief. “I—I am so—sorry. Listen, I

will tell you the whole truth." He put his arm round her, to support her, as it were.

"I am bound to another, do you understand? I love another."

She unloosed her hand from his.

"What do you mean?" she said, with a wild look in her wet eyes. "Who is it? Why?"

Then she turned from him, and leaning against one of the chess-tables began to sob violently. Her sobbing ended with a fit of hysterical laughter.

He stood by her; he felt dreadfully sorry for her, and said so.

"It's all my fault; I am so sorry. Upon my honour, I never thought you really meant—you never told me; that is, I——"

"Of course you knew," she interrupted him, in a voice choked by shame and rage. "You said you cared for me; you know you did." (He had never said any such thing, it was only her fancy.) "You knew I liked you. There, go! Go, and tell all the rest of your friends how you have tricked me; make up a pretty tale of scandal about me, you coward!"

"You may depend upon it I shall do nothing of the sort. It is my fault; I have made a fool of myself, but, on my word of honour, I never meant——"

“ Your honour, indeed ! I do know what a man of honour is. As to you—fool that I was ! But I will be even with you yet. Do your worst, like a coward, as you are. I hate you, I detest you,” stamping on the floor. “ I will make you repent of this, see if I don’t ! ”

And so saying, she ran out of the room.

There was no one near, for Bagrathion had already heard enough, and had prudently decamped. He had already heard that Jagellon loved some one else, and guessed too well who it was.

Meanwhile, Jagellon stood irresolute where she had left him. His main feeling was one of pity for her, and pity is a dangerous sentiment to have with regard to a woman. He was himself to blame, and how could he make amends ? There was only one way—to surrender at discretion ; and how could he do that ? He hardly dared to think of his beautiful Countess in connection with this horrible imbroglio.

In a state of perplexity he went slowly out of the room, like a man in a dream.

By this time most of the wearied guests had gone to bed ; there was nobody in the great hall—only from upstairs came the sound of voices and laughter.

Jagellon mechanically turned up the broad staircase, and there, on the second landing, whence a long corridor led to the various bedrooms, he came suddenly upon Madame Woronzow walking slowly to her room. She was dressed in black, with a black lace shawl over her shoulders ; her black hair was a little tumbled, and partially hid her white forehead, and as she stopped by one of the windows which revealed the darkness outside, she looked like a very spirit of the night, calm and passionless.

“ You are going to bed ? ” she asked, quietly.

“ Yes, good night.” His head was bent down as if he dared not look at her, his voice was oddly hoarse, and he held out his hand as he spoke. The place where they stood was but dimly lighted by a distant gas-jet, and his profile was only just defined in the *chiaroscuro* of the scene. She put out her hand from under her shawl.

“ Good night,” she said, in her gentle voice.

But they stood a moment, hand touching hand.

“ I am not worthy of you. Why do you not send me away ? it were best. You are too great, too pure, too far above me. I cannot reach you ; my wretched self is incapable of

imitating you. I am dragged back each time I aspire to you. Think no more of me."

She gently took her hand from his ; she thought a sudden gust of passion was shaking him, and she spoke to him with clear measured words.

" I do not send you away because I wish to try you. If you fail I shall esteem you for having tried, and if you conquer yourself I shall admire you." Then in a tone of command she went on—" You must be brave ; you must keep straight on the road of honour without swerving ; you must speak the truth without caring what may befall you ; you have to prove yourself worthy of the name you bear—of your ancestors who bore it before you."

" Yes, but it is hard ; you do not know all. I would I could tell you. It would be profanation. How can you exist in this horrid world ? "

" I am a weak woman," she answered ; " you are a strong man. If I can resist the world, you ought to be able to do it. If I can conquer myself," she added, in a lower tone, " surely you can."

" Ah, but you are stronger than I. Help me ; believe that I try to follow you, whatever anybody else says. Will you ? "

“ I will.”

And then they separated without another word. He turned round to look once at her as she moved along the corridor, till she turned down a passage and was lost to view. Then he went moodily to bed, to toss about half the night, thinking a little of poor Mrs. Price, but more of that vision of the Queen of the Night.

## CHAPTER XX.

## MRS. PRICE LEADS.

I suppose I shall not be accused of romancing if I state that Mrs. Price, as well as the object of her unfortunate attachment, passed a sleepless night after the scene just described, and, as a natural consequence of a proceeding so irregular, at least in these circumstances, Mrs. Price had a considerable headache the next morning, and a thorough fit of megrims.

Otherwise she was not much the worse for her little *contretemps* of the previous night, and, notwithstanding her headache, she had already matured her plans for preventing any bad results to herself from her blunder, and she might even hope, if she was successful in her plans, to be revenged on Count Jagellon for his stupidity.

First of all her indisposition was duly announced to Baroness Rosencranz, and by her retailed to the breakfast-table.

Now I should mention that the breakfast

party that morning was an unusually quiet one. There were few hearty appetites, possibly owing to the orgy of the previous night. Jagellon ate and spoke little; General Bagrathion munched grimly and in silence; the others drank a good deal of coffee, and only roused themselves to express their commiseration for Mrs. Price, in whose indisposition they fully sympathized at the moment.

After this short and uncomfortable breakfast, Baroness Rosencranz paid a visit to Mrs. Price in her room. She found the patient with a white silk handkerchief steeped in water on her forehead, and a woollen shawl thrown over her shoulders, possibly to convey an idea that she was really dressed, though in bed.

She lay with her head propped up by pillows, and her soft white hands lying on the white sheets, which had been nicely tidied by her maid. Altogether, what with a certain sentimental look in the eyes and some paleness of cheek, Mrs. Price looked, if anything, prettier than ordinary, and decidedly more interesting.

So, after the preliminary questions and responses, she began to tell her tale of woe to her hostess.

“ My dear Baroness, the fact is that I had to

endure a dreadful scene last night, and it has quite upset me."

"What about, dear?" placidly inquired the Baroness.

"Really, I hardly like to tell you, and yet I must, dear, to account for my leaving so suddenly. I must go directly, my dear Baroness, as soon as I am well enough to get up."

"I am very sorry to hear that. I hope, dear Mrs. Price, nothing has occurred to annoy you."

"Oh, I don't know what to do, it is all so shocking." And here she nestled herself down in the pillows and covered her face with her hands. "Oh dear! my head does ache so!"

Then the handkerchief was wetted again, after which the patient proceeded with her tale.

She told how she had met Count Jagellon at several places recently (the Baroness pricked up her ears at the name, for she had heard about the scandal in re the Count and Mrs. Price); how they had become quite friendly; and how she had found it necessary lately to be rather cautious with him, "knowing his reputed character," she said. Then she proceeded—"Well, last night he seemed to me rather odd in manner; I am afraid he was not sober, you know."

“Yes,” said the Baroness, “I noticed he was rather wild in his manner.”

“Exactly. So I only danced once with him. Well, after we came down from the ball-room, I happened to go into the chess-room to get cool and rest a little. There was no one there, when presently the Count came in. I rose to leave instinctively, you know, but he detained me; and oh! he began to say the most awful things; and then, when I said I would not listen to such things, or something of the sort, he—well, I can’t tell you—but I succeeded in getting free from him and rushed out of the room, and I ran upstairs and locked myself in here.”

“What a dreadful thing!” ejaculated the Baroness.

“Oh! I was so frightened! How I got away I don’t know. I believe I screamed out. Fortunately no one came; how dreadful it would have been if any one had come in! Oh dear! my head aches to think of it now——” And she turned on one side and rocked herself to and fro.

The Baroness kissed her, and petted her, and soothed her generally, calling her “poor child” and “dear thing,” and also uttering expressions of horror at the dastardly conduct of the Count.

Finally, she said she did not know what to advise.

“The only thing I can do is to send for my husband. Don’t you think so? He is at Torquay. If you would be so kind as to telegraph to him, and then I might leave to-morrow.”

“I will do so directly, my dear; but it is hard that you should have to go so suddenly, and I am sure I don’t want to have *him* here any longer.”

“No, I don’t know what can be done.”

“Had I not better talk the matter over with my husband?”

“Yes, I think so. I wish I had any one to act for *me*. I was thinking of saying something to Lord Uttoxeter. You see he knows us very well, and has always been so kind to us. I am afraid of *him* spreading some story about me, you see, and who’s to contradict *him*? ”

The Baroness agreed to this proposition, and so Lord Uttoxeter was first sent for to confer with the Baroness and her patient.

In a short time there came a discreet knock at the door, and in came my Lord with an air of indifference, not so much as looking at the pretty lace curtains to the window, or a little bonnet and gloves on a table, or the necessaria of a fashionable lady’s toilet, on the dressing-table,

or a pair of prettily worked slippers by the bedside.

No, his Lordship was strangely callous about these things, though surely they were matters of some interest to any one of the masculine gender. He simply came to the bedside, put further aside the curtains thereof (the bed was tent-shaped), and taking one of the patient's hands expressed his concern at seeing her poorly.

Then the Baroness gave him an outline of the story, while Mrs. Price lay still in bed looking a masterpiece of injured innocence.

Lord Uttoxeter seemed annoyed when he heard the Baroness's account of the affair.

He sat him down on a chair with his hands crossed on his stomach and frowned.

"Of course you must send for Price," he said. "I don't know what else you can do."

"Will you send off a message at once, then, my dear Baroness?" said Mrs. Price beseechingly. "If you will be so kind."

A message was thereupon concocted, and the Baroness went downstairs to give orders as to its despatch.

"Infernal nuisance!" muttered my Lord, as soon as he and his *protégée* were left together.

"Horrid nuisance!" assented the lady. "Look here, Uttoxeter, you will make *him* go,

anyhow. I mean to have some revenge on him — the horrid wretch!"

"What the deuce can I do?" asked Uttoxeter, peevishly.

"Why, tell Rosencranz you want him to go. He won't refuse *you*, I know."

"That's all very fine, but Rosencranz won't be so ready to turn away a man who does business with him."

"Well, can't you offer him some business as well?"

"I dare say, and annoy my own bankers."

"Well, if you won't do it, I will find somebody else who will," said Mrs. Price, decisively.

The Baroness returning just then interrupted their *tête-à-tête*.

After a further conference between the three, it was decided that Lord Uttoxeter should consult with Rosencranz about the matter, and my Lord departed to ponder over Mrs. Price's ultimatum.

He did not quite like the idea of the lady throwing aside his *protection* over her. Perhaps he might not have been adverse to breaking off the *liaison*, but he would, from the natural vanity of man, have preferred that he should throw her off, not she him.

In this difficulty he determined on consulting

first of all a man of his own rank, viz., my Lord Thryburgh

“Deuced awkward!” was Lord Thryburgh’s commentary on Lord Uttoxeter’s text.

“Confounded nuisance!” echoed the latter.

“What did he do?” asked Lord Thryburgh.

Now the ladies had not informed Uttoxeter what the precise offence was which Count Jagellon had committed. “Grossly insulted,” had been Baroness Rosencranz’s phrase. So, said Lord Uttoxeter, “Don’t know—kissed her, or something of the kind, I expect. He was rather tight last night, I fancy.”

“A good many of us were a little ‘on,’ ” said Lord Thryburgh, adding, after a pause, “I say, he must have done something rather bad, eh? for her to cut up so rough!”

“Very possible,” replied Lord Uttoxeter, indifferently. “What ought I to do, do you think?”

“I don’t see that you can do anything,” said Lord Thryburgh. “That’s Price’s business.”

“Well, but knowing the facts I can’t exactly meet the fellow in the same way as before.”

“Of course, if she makes a public affair of it we shall have to cut him,” assented Lord Thryburgh.

“Very awkward being with the fellow under the circumstances,” remarked Lord Uttoxeter.

"Rosencranz ought to send him away, somehow," said Lord Thryburgh.

"Will you asked him?"

"I? My dear Uttoxeter, it has nothing to do with me. *You* might ask him," suggested Lord Thryburgh.

"Do you think he would tell Jagellon to go if I asked him?"

"I should think so, if you made a special favour of it."

"I think it would a—be the best thing, don't you? It would make it less awkward for every one."

"Yes. Perhaps he will take himself off."

"Wish he would. He ought to. And a—you won't mention the subject, you know, Thryburgh."

"Oh, no, of course not."

Then the two lords broke off their conference, and Lord Thryburgh at once went and retailed the whole story in strict confidence to Gus, with comments of his own. "Awful row!" he said, summing up his account.

"I knew it would come to some mess," assented Gus.

In this way the story began slowly to spread; slowly, because many of the guests were out of doors, and until the great occasion for scandal

in the drawing-room after dinner—ladies only—none of the gentler sex heard the charming tale.

Still there was a vaguely uneasy feeling over dinner that day; the conversation was of a grave nature; the moot question of the dis-establishment of the Church was discussed, and the guests put on a solemnly aristocratic air, perhaps to make up for their vagaries of the previous evening.

There was a general air of suspicion around the table. Madame de Woronzow was secretly on the alert—she was watching for something to happen. For, after she had seen Jagellon the previous evening, she could not but suspect that something wrong had happened, and possibly she had a suspicion that Mrs. Price (from her sudden indisposition) was the mainspring of Jagellon's moodiness over dinner. For there sat the Count eating his dinner almost without a word, and he had an anxious look on his face, which he seemed to drive away with an effort now and then.

All this was very interesting to Lord Thryburgh and Gus, watching the symptoms.

Altogether it was evident that a storm was brewing; the clouds were gathering together, whence was the first flash of lightning to come?

## CHAPTER XXI.

## ATTACK AND DEFENCE.

GENERAL BAGRATHION began it. He also had not had his usual *quantum* of sleep during the night, and he had spent the greater part of the day in making his dispositions for attack.

What! had he been duped and deceived all along by the astute Countess?

The *dénouement* of his scheme at the Equality Club was now all too plain.

It was perfectly natural in the circumstances that the Countess should have called in the aid of Jagellon on that occasion as her accepted lover, or even her paramour, the General thought, giving scope to the little imagination he possessed.

General Bagrathion was not a man to hesitate when the moment for action came. He had been practised in forming his resolutions rapidly and acting decisively in the arena of European politics, and now that he had heard from Jagellon's own lips not only that he loved

the Countess (as Bagrathion interpreted his words), but that he was “bound to her,” he simply resolved that he would either force the Countess to leave her lover, or—or hazard everything to be revenged on her. She was in his power, he said to himself, as much as he in hers.

He could denounce her to the Russian Government as a rebel ; he could hold her up to the view of society as one who was hand-in-glove with men who were known to be unscrupulous assassins—conspirators against all law and order. What would become of her position in the world then ?

So resolved to put it to the touch, he sought a private interview with the Countess. He had no difficulty in finding an opportunity ; he had only to say to the Countess, whilst no one was near enough to hear, that he wanted to see her “about affairs,” and she at once agreed to meet him that very evening. She appointed the library for their interview—a room which was seldom occupied after dinner—in the very room where she had a day or two before come to an explanation with Count Jagellon.

“ You have deceived me,” Bagrathion said when they were together, standing up before her with anger in his eyes.

“How?” she asked. He had the advantage of taking her by surprise.

“You promised some time since that you would marry me.”

“Well?” she interrupted him.

“I behaved badly—I acknowledge it—and for the time the proposed match was broken off. Well, I admitted my fault, as I do now; you, as I thought, generously forgave me, and allowed me time to retrieve my error.”

“Well?” she said again.

“It was false, you never meant to marry me—never! You played with me from the first. I know now that you love some one else.”

“How dare you say that to me?” she said, colouring with anger.

“I know it is true. He said so himself.”

“Who?”

“Count Jagellon.” At these words she started slightly, then stood motionless. The General duly noted the effect of the name he uttered.

“*If* he has said that, he has told an untruth,” she said, slowly. “When did he tell you?”

“He did not tell me, I overheard him saying it to some one else.”

“Who?” she asked, quickly.

“Never mind who.” She gave a slight laugh. “Well, then, I accidentally heard him

tell Mrs. Price he could not be her lover because he was bound to you. She is mad about him, as I dare say you know, but he refused to be her lover because, he said, distinctly, he loved another."

She remained silent for a moment, while he watched her with his angry eyes.

" You must have been mistaken," she said at last.

" I heard him distinctly."

" I give you my word there is nothing between Count Jagellon and myself. I know him as my countryman, and as such he is a friend of mine, that is all."

She spoke calmly, looking him in the face, and he returned her look as if to find out all her thoughts.

" Will you prove your words?"

" In what way?"

" Cut him, send him away, and have nothing more to do with him."

" How can I?"

" He will go if you tell him."

" What right have I to tell him to go away? Upon my word, General, you have made a mistake."

" You will not persuade me out of it. He said plainly that he was bound to another, and I knew he meant you."

“How did you know?”

“From a little conversation I happened to overhear in this very room.”

“You seem to be in the habit of eavesdropping,” she replied.

“It is useful for finding out people who deceive you.”

“I have not deceived you. I tell you that Count Jagellon is merely an acquaintance of mine.”

“Very well, I demand that the acquaintance should cease.”

“What right have you to demand that?”

“Because if you allow any one, especially a man who is not in the Society, to come between you and me, you are unfaithful to the cause.”

“I am not. Bring the case before the Society, and I will soon show them who is most faithful, you or I.”

“Very well, I give you your choice.”

“What choice?”

“Cease your intimacy with Count Jagellon, or——”

“Or what?” she asked, sharply.

“I will denounce you.”

“You are mad,” she answered, in a low voice.

“You know it will cost you your life.”

“I don’t care for that. Look here, I have

only to send a letter to the Russian Embassy—I have only to reveal what I know, and the game is up; you and your friends will be ruined."

He had approached close to her, the better to whisper these words in her ear, and each looked into the other's eyes, trying to gauge the extent of each other's daring. But her eyes did not quail before his fierce gaze.

"Beware, General!" she said, in a deep low voice. "You are playing a dangerous game with me."

"Make your choice," he answered hotly, for he was half-maddened by her beauty.

"No!"

"Very good. I'll make you pay for it."

He turned to leave the room.

For a moment she remained steadfast; then, as the magnitude of the risk to her, and to all her compatriots, came into her mind, she gave way—she stooped to entreaty.

"Bagrathion, we must not part like this. Give me till next week. I will leave England next week, and will never see him again. There, will that satisfy you?" and she looked beseechingly in his hard face.

He was silent. He looked into the beautiful dark eyes; it was giving up so much to give her up.

“I cannot tell him to leave, but I will leave him myself.” There was the slightest tremor in her voice as she said this. “That will be best, will it not? I can go away next week very well; it is only a few days more. What more can I do?” she pleaded.

But General Bagrathion was not accustomed to exercise any mercy, or to swerve from his fixed plans—that had not been the method by which he had won his fame in the world.

“No,” he said, “send him away at once; tell him plainly that you do not wish to know him any longer. That will satisfy me.”

She took her hand from his arm, where it had stayed as she pleaded with him, and she stood with downcast eyes pondering. He folded his arms and waited for her decision.

Suddenly she looked up.

“Very well, I will do it,” she said quickly. “I will *make* him go to-morrow; but mind, you must not blame me for the consequences. Good night,” and she walked straight to the door.

“Stay,” he called out, puzzled by her manner and fearing he knew not what, but she was already outside the door, and swiftly traversing the next room, disappeared from his view.

She was driven to bay at last.

She must lose *him* or bring ruin—or at least

danger and loss—on her friends, and on the cause of her country, for which she had lived and struggled.

Let us say it, to lose him before would have been hard, but now that she knew by every proof that he was hers, it was a terrible sacrifice to make, and till she had to make it she did not know how much she loved him.

Now she saw it all. As she walked to and fro during the silent hours of the night, she found that she also was bound to him—she was his. He did not know she was in his power, and it were better that he should never know it. So she must tell him to leave her—though if—

She did not finish the conditional sentence in her thoughts.

A woman driven to bay is somewhat dangerous. She acts by impulse, she has no mercy, she has no scruples, she is utterly implacable, and she cares not who or what she destroys so long as she breaks through her difficulties and masters her foes.

Countess Woronzow was ordinarily a woman of prudence, acting by calculation; she was now transformed into a mere woman of impulse, and after passing the night in debating with herself whether or not she should give him up altogether,

she simply went to him the next morning to make her request, without considering whether he would grant it or not.

She met Count Jagellon after breakfast, told him to come with her, and led him into the chess-room, where they stood together by the window looking on to the river. No one interrupted them ; there is a fate in these things, for the affairs of love generally take place in the most frequented places, yet no one ever finds them out.

She spoke first, though, now that she was face to face with him, all her courage, all her impulse died away. Her eyes looked down at her watch-chain, with which she played nervously.

“I want to ask you something,” she began.

“What is it?” he asked mechanically ; he was looking at the smooth round chin as it rested on her throat—below it was a gold locket which moved as she breathed and spoke.

“Will you go to-morrow—away from here?”

“Where to?” he asked.

“Anywhere, away from here.”

A cloud, as it were, passed over his face, when he understood her meaning.

“Why, what have I done?”

“Nothing.”

“Then why do you send me away?”

She interrupted him. "I cannot tell you the reason—I ask it as a favour."

"Tell me what I have done; how can I have offended you?"

"You have not offended me." She was still playing with her watch-chain.

"Is it Mrs. Price?" he asked in a low voice.

"No," she replied, looking up quickly and then looking down again. "Will you go for my sake?"

"Do you wish me to go?"

The question was unanswerable—she did, and she did not, wish it.

"Do you?" he repeated.

"I do not wish you to go," she said; "but it will be of great service to me if you do."

He looked at her doubtfully.

"Ah! Countess, upon my honour you are hard on me," he said. "Am I your enemy, that you always want me away? Do I not always obey you? Yes, I will obey you now. I will go as soon as you like; but where am I to go to? What can I do away from you. You know I only care to be with you. I don't want any reward. Have I ever asked for any favour from you except to see you now and then? and even this you now deny me. Are you not hard on me? Do you not think you are unkind?"

She stood perfectly still listening to his reproaches. "What do you wish me to do?" she asked.

Then, without more ado, he told his tale of love, taking her permission for granted.

"Dearest Countess," he said, "you have no idea how hopelessly and utterly I love you. What can I do? I live in it, I do nothing else but love you; I should not be myself if you were away. Do not fear me," he went on, taking her hand. "Do not think there is any danger in my loving you. Supposing no man had ever deceived any woman, would you not then like to be loved without any fear? And why should I harm you? How could I, when I am so fond of you? No one can see you without admiring you; no one could possibly do anything to you but love you and worship you. That is all I want—let me love you always; use me as you please, as belonging to you—will you?"

She had listened in silence to him, now she raised her splendid eyes to his, and putting her other hand in his, just linked together as they were, she spoke to him.

"Listen to me. You know it is not in my power to give myself. Besides that I am bound by vows to another, you know, my dear Jagellon,

that my life is devoted to the cause of Poland. I have already given myself to the good cause, and I may not give you my love if I would."

He interrupted her.

"But let me also be devoted to the cause of my country. We are both of one nation, are we not? Let us be united in one aim, let us fight side by side, pour la patrie."

"No, no, you do not know the dangers."

"And you will not let me share them with you? Look here, I will leave here the first thing to-morrow. I'll find some excuse, and I will go and see Mr. Mentzel."

"Hush!" she said; "speak lower."

"And," he added, "I will bind myself body and soul to you and your cause. There, grant me only this. Then we shall be united for always. Say yes, dearest Countess, say yes."

"I cannot resist you," she answered, "but do not decide hastily. Think that you will have to obey absolutely your leaders. Your whole life, your pleasures, and work will be at the command of—"

"You!" he put in. "It is all for you. Danger? it is rather exciting, one has so little of it in the world. And as to the rest, I have no objection to leaving society—society and re-

spectability are nothing to me, and I am sure I am nothing to society."

Then there was a pause. At last—

"When shall I see you again?" he asked.

"I cannot say, you must trust to me."

His reply may be easily imagined.

And then followed one of those delicious conversations which are so flat, stale and unprofitable to the general, and heaven to those concerned in them, while she sat down inside the Elizabethan window where, doubtless, the same sort of thing had been enacted in times gone by, and he stood near looking his fill at his beautiful woman.

No one interrupted them. They had it all to themselves until lunch time, when they were obliged to separate and descend to the every-day world from their little heaven.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## EXILED.

WHILE Jagellon was making the best of his last day at Ladywell, the society of that house was being shaken to its foundations. A lady had been grossly insulted! And by a gentleman staying at the house!

During that morning Mrs. Price, still keeping to her room, had been holding a levée, attended by lady sympathizers.

They were unanimous in their condemnation of Count Jagellon—possibly because they had not had the advantage of being similarly insulted themselves.

Simultaneously a conclave of men had been held in the smoking-room to sift the evidence in the case, and endeavour to ascertain the *exact* nature of the “insult.” The mildest statement (that of Baron Rosencranz) was to the effect that Jagellon had attempted to kiss Mrs. Price. General Bagrathion’s evidence on the subject was regarded as important. The General was

beginning rather to regret his move with Madame Woronzow, having heard the received account of Mrs. Price's proceedings with regard to Count Jagellon. However, he made the best of it by corroborating Mrs. Price's account of the affair, in so far as he stated that he had seen Mrs. Price that evening run across the hall in a disorderly and agitated manner, and go upstairs.

This statement was about true, and it confirmed the conclave in its opinion that Jagellon had made a very daring attempt indeed.

Of course it was the universal opinion that Jagellon ought to leave the place, and it was generally understood that Baron Rosencranz was to give him a hint to this effect. In fact this was what came to pass that very evening just before dinner. Rosencranz and Jagellon ran against one another so to speak, both anxious to inform each other of the same thing.

“Ah, Count, you are the very man I wish to see.”

“So do I, my dear Rosencranz. What is it?”

“This—ahem!—affair about Mrs. Price—hem?” Rosencranz felt rather nervous about the business, which made him speak with a little mixture of the Jewish *Thibboleth*.

“ Why, what about her ? ” asked Jagellon, somewhat surprised.

“ The thays you have inthulted ’er, hm ? ”

“ The devil she does ? ” said the other, laughing.

“ Very awkward business, my dear Count ; ver-ry awkward. Perhaps it would be well if you were—ahem ! — to withdraw—hm ! ”

“ Oh ! certainly, the very thing I was going to tell you. I must leave to-morrow *sans cérémonie*. I have to attend to some important business of my own.”

“ Indeed ! ” said Rosencranz. “ Of course I should be sorry to turn you away— ”

“ Exactly,” interrupted Jagellon, “ but I must go, you see. Poor Mrs. Price ! what has she been saying about me, eh ? ”

“ She says you have insulted her. I do not know exactly in what way.”

“ By Jove, I fancy I did a little. Well, I am sorry for her, and shall be glad to do anything I can to please her ; tell her so if you see her.”

“ Very off-hand like,” said Rosencranz afterwards to some others who inquired how the Count had taken his dismissal. “ Laughed it off, and said he wanted to go away on urgent business.”

“It’s a queer business,” remarked Hudson. “I wonder what really did happen between them?”

It certainly was a little puzzling. Gus did not know what to make of it. He told Countess Woronzow about it.

“Have you heard about Jagellon?” he asked her.

“What about him?” she asked in reply.

“They say he has insulted Mrs. Price in some way. Everybody is talking about it.”

“Has he?” said she with a turn of her head. “Je ne le crois pas.”

She looked him in the face and then turned away, leaving Gus more puzzled than ever.

However, it was felt by the majority of the inhabitants of Ladywell to be a relief that Count Jagellon was going; the honour of society had been vindicated.

In future it would be well to treat the Count with coolness. It was also relieving to the ladies not to be taken down to dinner by the man, and they had one and all resolved to decline the dubious honour; but it was rather startling to see Countess Woronzow accept his proffered services and walk down to dinner with a haughty air of insouciance, and one defiant glance at General Bagrathion as she passed by

him, leaning on Jagellon's arm. She defied him and society.

He had played his trump-card, and now she was returning his lead, perfectly reckless of consequences.

Over dinner she kept the table round amused with her powers of ridicule and sarcasm.

Was a foreign policy mentioned? She twisted it into the appearance of an absurd farce.

Was a statesman commended? She held him up to laughter with an epigram.

Her persiflage seemed to be acceptable to the company. They acknowledged that there was nothing real in the world—all was sham, and might be laughed at as such. The bitterness of the idea gave piquancy to their luxurious feast, like olives to the wine. One thing only was real—the pleasure of eating, and of drinking good wine.

Such ideas were of the right *ton* for over-dinner conversation, and after dinner the subject might be further treated of in the spirit of an easy Epicureanism over cigars, and rich liqueurs.

“Gad! the Countess would make one disbelieve in the virtue of one's own mother,” remarked Lord Thryburgh.

“Why not?” drawled Uttoxeter, “since one cannot believe in the virtue of one’s own wife.”

“What’s the good of believing in morality, or law and order, and all that sort of thing?” inquired Mr. Hudson.

“Especially when it is doubtful whether any one of them exists,” put in Jagellon.

“As to the law,” remarked another man, “we all know what that is.”

“A happy means of acquiring wealth without having to trouble yourself about being honest,” one man defined it.

“A convenient way of becoming a minister or a peer when you are neither a statesman, a soldier, a diplomatist, or a financier,” suggested another.

“What I can’t understand,” said Lord Thryburgh, “is how the law is dodged. Of course those Roman fellows had it written down for them, so they knew how to judge any case. But there is no written law now-a-days, is there?”

“Don’t know,” muttered some one.

“Else how,” proceeded my Lord, “can a yokel who steals a cabbage or a cow get five years’ penal servitude, and a fellow who swindles and ruins a whole lot of people have only a

year's imprisonment? Has each judge to give what punishment he thinks proper?"

"Or do they toss up, heads six months, tails five years?" hazarded Hudson.

"Yes, that is what I complain of," said Lord Uttoxeter in a plaintive voice. "For instance, a cabman assaults a lady with the brutality usual amongst that class of people, and he only gets a few months' imprisonment. That is all very well. But supposing a gentleman in a weak moment happens to forcibly kiss a girl, he will probably be punished with a year or two's imprisonment, and a heavy fine into the bargain. I don't think that's fair, you know. A little more liberty and equality in such matters would be nicer."

"The magistrate has sometimes a fellow-feeling for the sport; that accounts for the light sentence on your cabman," said Hudson.

"Ah, a little revolution which would give us all the pleasures, and the proletariat all the nuisance, of governing would be rather a pleasant change," said Jagellon.

"Oh, I don't believe in revolutions and Reform Bills and all that sort of thing. Things always go on just the same as before," said Lord Thryburgh, the descendant of a race of thorough Tories.

“ ‘Pon my word,” said Gus, now breaking into the discussion, “ I cannot make out sometimes how Government is carried on. Most of the men I have met with know nothing about it ; and if a man is clever it is ten to one he has no influence to back him up, and without that he cannot get on. Yet things go on somehow, notwithstanding the number of blunders that are constantly being made. By Jove ! I think if we had one really clever man we should rule the roast.”

“ My dear fellow,” replied Jagellon, “ you would burst up the whole concern. Why, it would be the old story of King Stork over again, and a precious row there would be amongst the frogs.”

“ One able man will make half a dozen wars,” growled General Bagrathion.

“ Besides, people do not want clever men,” proceeded Jagellon. “ You have to govern according to the will of the majority, and the majorities prefer ordinary men no better than anybody else.”

“ Well, you don’t seem to think much of the intellects of most people,” remarked Lord Uttoxeter.

“ Perhaps not,” the other replied ; “ but in any case I contend that the intelligent people

do not rule, and the proof of it is this. You will admit that the greatest amount of intelligence is in the large towns—certainly in the capital of a country. Well, is there a single capital in Europe which votes for the party that governs?"

"Paris does," said Gus, promptly.

"Yes, Paris rules France and the world!" added some one grandiloquently.

"I don't know about that, but France has nothing to complain of, if she is ruled by the capital," said Jagellon.

"So I say," replied Gus. "Why cannot we have clever men at the top of the tree; why not have more open competition in politics instead of everything going by influence?"

A pause followed Gus's queries, as no one seemed able to answer them.

At length Lord Uttoxeter said, "I wish I was a Frenchman."

"Good! Bravo! You would make an excellent sort of Philippe Egalité. *Le citoyen Uttoxeter* sounds well"—were some of the exclamations of the others.

"I mean it," continued his Lordship with a serious air; "your principles of '89 were undoubtedly happy thoughts. Liberty, to do what you like, bar the Code; Equality, so that

you are no worse off than any other sinner, if you do make a slip ; Fraternity, that is love your neighbour generally. Besides, to live in Paris always, without having to come here, would be so delicious ! After all there is no place like Paris."

"London gives you the blues with its beastly fogs, and houses, and statues," said Hudson.

"Berlin gives you the cholera," remarked Gus.

"Rome gives you malaria, which is worse," from Lord Thryburgh.

"St. Petersburg gives you bronchitis," put in Jagellon.

"Constantinople"—began Lord Uttoxeter, but the end of his sentence was lost in a chorus of laughter.

"Vive Paris!" said Jagellon in conclusion, rising from his chair—a movement which was copied by the others.

"Jagellon is not a bad fellow," said Uttoxeter confidentially to Hudson. "Wish he was not so indiscreet."

Possibly he regretted his share in sending the Count away. Possibly there was a momentary regret amongst the majority of the men at losing a festive man, whatever his morals might be. But, on the whole, it was perhaps a relief to be

without him. He was not the same as the others ; he was not quite English, he was too daring and *outré* in his ideas ; he had come perhaps a century too late or a century too soon into the world. He was as well out of society, and society thought no more about it.

The last evening soon passed—the last evening the Polish Count would pass amidst the *haut monde*. And it was not to society that he regretfully bade farewell, it was to his own world, his love, that he sadly said good-bye. True, it was only for a little while, but is it not with a lover parted from his mistress that time ambles withal ?

So they stood together in the hall under the shadow of the broad staircase, Jagellon and his lovely Countess—she was lovelier than ever in his eyes, now that he was going away from her. He was telling her how he had taken his leave of Rosencranz. “The fact is he wanted me to go,” he said. “I have terribly offended Mrs. Price, you must know. I will tell you all about it if you like.”

“I know all about it,” she answered.

“Do you? How did you get to know?”

“Never mind. Well, go on, what about her?”

“Well, of course she is very angry, and she insists that I have insulted her, and that she or

I must leave the house, so Rosencranz was commissioned to ask me to go. Very convenient, was it not?"

Madame Woronzow was frowning and tapping her foot on the ground. What woman would not have felt angry at another stepping in between her and her lover in this way?

"How dare she!" she muttered. "Never mind, I will stop her. Oh dear, it makes me angry to see such women!"

"Never mind her, my dear Countess," interrupted Jagellon. "After all it was partly my fault, and I cannot help being sorry for her. So I am going to-morrow the first thing in the morning, and—and perhaps I shan't see you again." He takes her hand in his.

"Perhaps I shall see you in the morning," she says.

"No, no. I shall start very early. When shall I see you again?"

"I will let you know."

"It will not be long?"

"No, it will be soon."

"Oh, but it seems a long time to me to be absent from you one hour!"

"You can think of me, and I shall be thinking of you."

"Shall you?"

“ Yes, certainly, and I shall be anxious to know how you succeed with Mentzel. Here is a letter for him,” giving him a sealed envelope unaddressed.

“ Yes, I will write and tell you.”

“ No, do not write to me at all. I shall hear about you.”

“ Not at all?”

“ No, it is better not. I will write to you if you like.”

“ Oh yes, every day if you can !”

“ And you will not be miserable, will you ?”

“ Not when I get your letters.”

Then there was an expressive silence ; hand-in-hand they stood, he looking at her.

“ Now I must go,” she said. “ Good-bye !”

“ Oh, it is hard to go !” said he.

“ It is only for a little time.”

How lovely she was ! Her eyelids drooped, her breath came softly between her lips ; a white rose on her bosom rose and fell as she breathed. To take her in his arms and pour out all his passion to her, what delicious delight it would be ! Should he ? She might feel hurt, he thought, if he did. He did not think she would refuse him, because she was always so kind to him, but—No, no, no ! “ Good-bye, dear Countess, good-bye, good-bye !” He wrung her

hand so violently that she would have screamed, only she never thought of the mere physical pain. He snatched his hand from hers and turned and walked swiftly away.

She looked after him—she looked and lingered a moment, then went dreamily upstairs.

The next morning Count Jagellon bade Lady-well adieu for ever !

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## ONE OF THEM.

VULTURE STREET in a fog—that is the height of dismal existence. A fog that blinds you, that darkens the light of day, through which the gas-lights in the grocer's shop in vain struggle to give light. You can see little or nothing about you, but you are conscious that all around is dirt and filth ; the causeway is slimy with a dark grey ooze, the windows of the houses are unwashed, and you tread on filthy garbage, cabbage leaves and other refuse, as you cross the street.

Dante with all his imagination never imagined aught so beastly and disgusting as Vulture Street in a fog.

To this land of Egypt was Jagellon exiled. No need of secrecy in his movements ; no one could possibly notice him ; and even the sound of the little bell was muffled by the heavy air as he entered Mr. Mentzel's shop, where he found Mentzel himself diligently carving with the aid

of a gas-jet and spectacles. He greeted his visitor with much cordiality and was evidently glad to see him. He conducted him into the parlour, and having apologized shortly for his rough dress, he sat down opposite the Count to have a chat. No one could be in Mr. Mentzel's society for five minutes without being impressed by his quiet and polite manners ; his outward appearance, at least his clothes, flatly belied him. You would have said he was a gentleman in disguise. On the other hand, had any stranger been told that this man was a dangerous rebel and assassin, he would have laughed at the very idea.

“ I have a note for you,” began Jagellon, “ from Madame Woronzow, which I hope you will approve of.”

“ Ah, indeed ? I hope she is quite well.”

So saying he read the letter carefully without an expression on his face. When he had finished it, he looked up at Jagellon.

“ Do you know the contents of this ? ” he asked.

“ I can pretty well guess. She wishes you to take me as one of you, does she not ? ”

“ Yes.” He was silent for a minute and then added, “ Why do you wish to join us ? What is our cause to you ? ”

“What else have I to care for? what else is there to do worth doing?”

“Amuse yourself as you have always done.”

“Tried to do, you mean. No, I am sick of it all—the world is not amusing. On my honour, I simply envy you your definite aims and labours.”

“Do you? Supposing, Count, you were in love” (Jagellon looked hard at him), “and supposing your love was absolutely hopeless, and that you could never gain her and never care for another, what would you do?”

“Endure life as best I could until fate was good enough to kill me.”

“Very good, that is my lot,” said the old man. “I am in love with Poland. I have loved her from the very earliest years I can remember; I have given up all hope of winning her, yet you envy me my life.”

He spoke with no vehemence, rather as if he were discussing some light subject in a drawing-room.

“By Jove!” exclaimed Jagellon, “at least you will have fame, and that——”

“Fame!” interrupted the other, “I doubt if I shall be remembered at all after death; if I am, it will be either as a visionary fool or an execrable assassin.”

“Ah, that is what makes you fail,” retorted

the younger man. "You do not believe in your own idea. If you are not convinced that you have found out the policy of the future, that you are right and every one against you has made a mistake, why do you go on working at your idea? If you do not believe that the next generation will worship you, you must be in the wrong."

"My dear Count, generation after generation has fought and died for Poland without success."

"Ah, success!" replied the Count. "After all success is not everything. The best horse does not always win the Derby, and there are many famous men who have not succeeded."

"Well! but why involve yourself in a hopeless enterprise when there are other means of making your fame?"

"My dear Mentzel, all other means of distinction are already crowded out, but success now in the liberation of our country would certainly make you rather a big man, simply from the novelty of the undertaking—

*"Et si de l'obtenir je n'emporte le prix  
J'aurai du moins l'honneur de l'avoir entrepris."*

The old man regarded the young aspirant fixedly for a moment, then suddenly getting up from his chair he said—

"Well, I will tell you on what terms I will admit you into the Society. Wait here a moment."

So saying he quitted the room, returning in a few moments with a paper in his hand.

"Count," he said, "the terms I shall propose to you are manifestly unfair as regards yourself. If you sign this document here you will place yourself in my power, for it is a declaration of revolutionary principles, and your signature will be countersigned by names which are notorious and detested by nearly every Government in Europe. On the other hand, I shall let you know none of our projects, and perhaps none of our associates. You will have to do exactly what I order you to do in the interests of the Society, and you will have to devote your whole fortune to us if we require it. In return I will only say this, if you perform faithfully what is required of you, you shall be more and more closely united to us. And if you at any time wish to give up the game I will tear this up, provided you know none of our secrets."

Count Jagellon listened attentively to Mr. Mentzel's proposals, and after a pause said— "May I see the declaration before signing it?"

"Certainly," said Mentzel, laying the document on the table for Jagellon to read.

It was a formal declaration of revolutionary principles, as Mr. Mentzel had said ; it pledged the signatory to devote himself to the liberation of Poland, and one or two other objects ; it bound him to undertake or at least to assist in the subversion of certain Governments which were declared to be inimical to liberty ; and it devoted himself and his means absolutely and unreservedly to the Society. It ended somewhat in this fashion :—“ And I solemnly swear not to betray any secret of this Society, nor inform any person of any matter useful to this Society, except the members thereof ; and should I break any of these pledges, I hereby acknowledge the justice of any punishment which the Society may inflict upon me.” Such were the vows and penalties of this Secret Society, and they were perhaps as efficacious and as binding as those of any other of the many so-called secret societies which exist in our curious civilization. Jagellon read this document over with some curiosity. Probably he did not see much meaning in it, and considered it merely a matter of form.

“ Well,” he said, “ there is one thing I do not quite understand. Why should you make a point of destroying these Governments here ? ” (pointing to the paragraphs.) “ Not that I have

any particular liking for them myself, but still they are better than nothing, and they might be reformed."

"I think I can explain that to you," replied Mr. Mentzel. "As a matter of fact that clause is superfluous, and it merely defines our policy. For when you subscribe to *the cause of liberty* you have already condemned these Governments. We have long seen that once the people are free the Governments must fall to the ground. As to what is to be the substitute of these Governments, that we cannot predetermine, we must leave it to their respective peoples."

The Count looked at the document again, while he meditated on Mr. Mentzel's enunciation of the vague creed of revolution. At last he said—

"Perhaps you are right. That is the only objection I have to make; however, I accept your explanation. Shall I sign it at once?"

"Will you not first consider it a little?" urged Mr. Mentzel, astonished at the Count's easy readiness.

"My dear Mentzel, I have already considered it, and I am quite resolved to join with you. It is for you to say."

"Very well, do as you choose." He gave

Jagellon pen and ink, and the Count signed his name boldly—

WENCESLAUS COUNT JAGELLON.

“There,” he said, “it is done. Now, Mentzel, I am your subordinate, order me as you please.”

“You are also my brother,” returned Mentzel, taking him by the hand with an appearance of emotion that Jagellon did not quite comprehend. He then told the Count that he should lay the matter before the “Committee,” and he said that he did not doubt that they would approve of Count Jagellon’s adhesion.

“For,” said he, “they approved of it before, subject to Madame de Woronzow’s decision.”

“Oh, ah,” said Jagellon, “so I understood; shall you write to her?”

“I never write to her,” replied Mentzel. “I shall see her to-morrow, probably.”

“Where?”

“At Ladywell.”

“But how?”

“Easily enough. I have met her there already.”

“Really?”

“Yes,” proceeded Mentzel, smiling at the other’s incredulity. “My dear Count, have you yet to learn that there are many things which

go on, even in society, that few people could possibly dream of? Now," he went on, "there are one or two things I must tell you. Go on just the same as if nothing had occurred, and do not expect that you will be employed in anything at once. We may not want you for some time; when we do, we shall certainly find you. Let me know if you move from London, and if you hear of anything that concerns us tell me at once."

Of course Jagellon agreed to follow these directions.

"Stop, there is one thing more," said Mentzel; "you know General Bagrathion, do you not?"

Jagellon replied in the affirmative.

"Do not say a word to him about this. If you meet him, behave to him exactly as you have always done."

"All right. But I thought he was one of your party?"

"Never mind what he is, follow my directions," said Mr. Mentzel emphatically.

Then after a little more conversation Jagellon rose to go, and Mr. Mentzel, after seeing him to the door of the shop, shook hands with him with a certain *empressement*.

When the Count was outside again in the dismal fog, he felt that he was bound up, as it

were, with the man he had just left. There seemed to be a sort of fatality about it. That man had been the comrade of his father, he had fought by his side, and had suffered with him, and now the son, himself, had been drawn to him by some occult influence, which Jagellon could not define, though he was conscious of it. And till now he had not fully realized what his father had been—the adventurous and almost romantic life he had led. He felt as if he had been living in a dream, and he had waked up to find himself the son of a Polish rebel, the inheritor of a desperate enterprise carried on from generation to generation, from father to son.

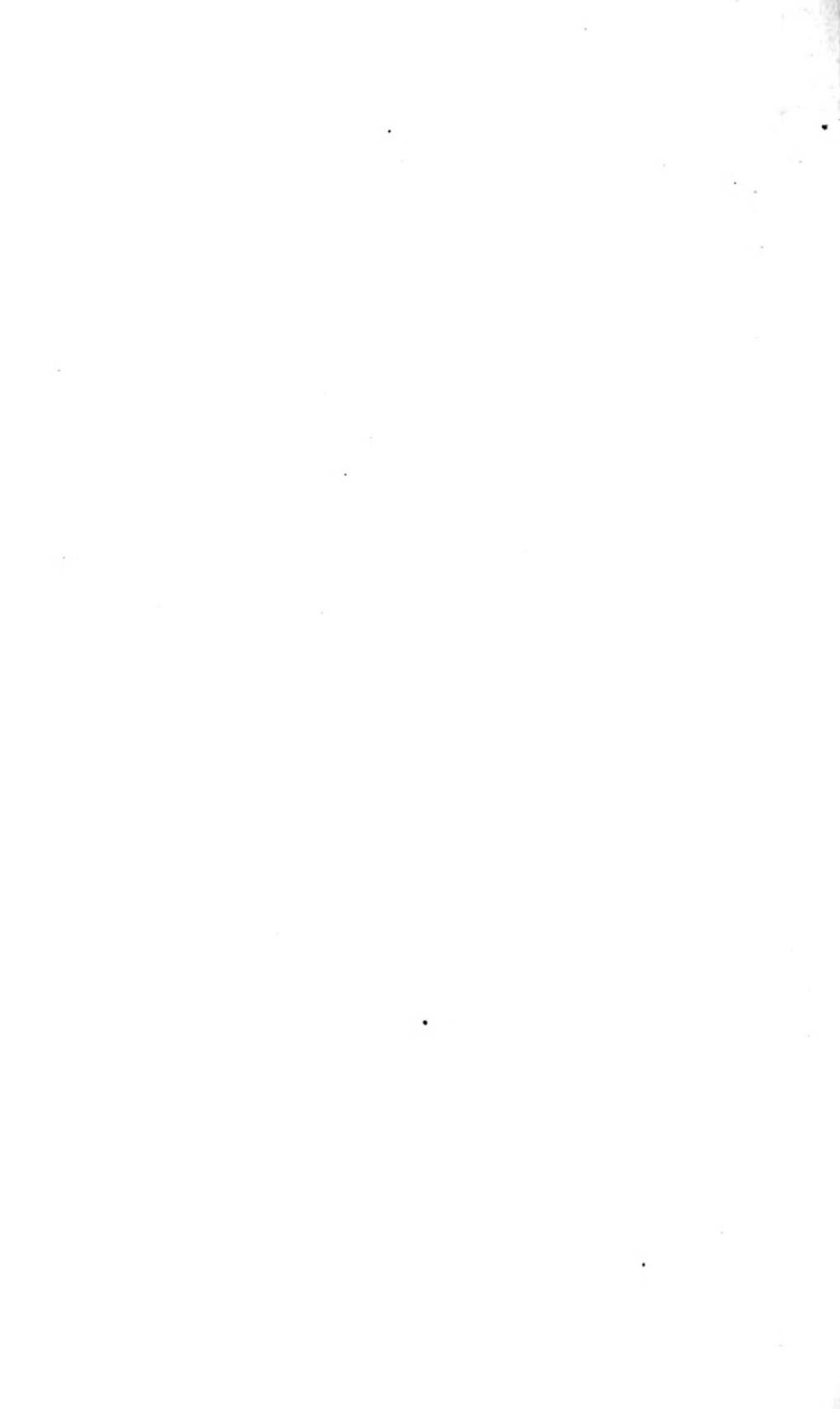
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